UNIVERZITA KARLOVA

Filozofická Fakulta

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Labyrinths in Postmodernism:
Danielewski, Pynchon, and Wallace

Master's Thesis

Zpracovala (author): Teja Šosterič

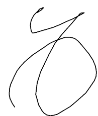
Studijní obor (field of study): American Literature and Cultural Studies

Vedoucí diplomové práce (supervisor): doc. Erik Sherman Roraback, D. Phil (Oxon)

Rok (year of defense): 2020

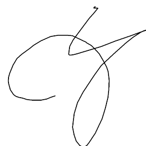
Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 27.12.2019



I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

In Prague, 27 December 2019



Acknowledgments:

I first heard of Jorge Luis Borges when a friend told me he was their favorite author, which inspired me to read *Labyrinths*. Soon after that, I encountered *House of Leaves* in a class at this very university – Experimental Fiction II taught by David Vichnar. Through *House of Leaves* I found Penelope Reed Doob and her work on labyrinthine texts, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, which opened my mind to the possibilities of labyrinthine analysis of literary works. It was this sequence of events that led to my choosing this thesis topic, and I am grateful for all the little coincidences and everyone involved in leading me down this path.

I would like to sincerely thank Erik Roraback for his support and supervision of the thesis. His feedback guided my work and his kind words helped motivate me through the writing process. I would like to thank Richard Ward for his invaluable help with the proofreading – without his input the thesis would be far less polished than it is. Thank you also to Marek Torčík and to Kseniia Batalova for their help. Finally, I would like to thank Julian, whose easy-going yet honest friendship has helped keep me sane through the stress.

Contents

Introduction and Summary 5
Introduction 5
Summary 7
Chapter I: The Immortal Maze 10
Myths, Monsters, and Mazy Metaphors 10
Mapping Literary Labyrinths 15
Labyrinthine Characteristics of Literary Texts 20
Labyrinthine Narrative 20
Labyrinthine Structure on the Page 21
Labyrinthine Language 22
Labyrinthine Plot Elements 22
Chapter II: The Circular Ruins of War 24
Chapter III: The Halfway House of Asterion 38
Chapter IV: The Trauma of Forking Paths 56
Chapter V: The Media Library of Babel 71
Conclusion 83
Bibliography 91
Abstracts in English and Czech 99

Introduction and Summary

Introduction

The labyrinth is a universally recognizable and ancient symbol that can take on a variety of forms. Few symbols can hold such a variety of meanings in both their physical and metaphorical manifestations and few have been so persistently present throughout history. Labyrinths can be massive structures that house monsters or serve as tombs, but they can also be hedge or turf mazes created for entertainment. They can be puzzles meant to be solved by children, or mosaics on the floors of churches. Labyrinths can be used metaphorically to describe anything from buildings with a complicated architecture to the experience of trying to decipher a difficult problem, or they can serve as a metaphor for moral transformation. They can even be used as an analogy for the universe itself.

Often, the term labyrinthine is used to describe works of literature, and critical texts have been written analyzing labyrinthine texts throughout history:[1] this thesis continues that work. While labyrinthine works can be any literary genre, this thesis concerns itself primarily with novels, specifically three postmodern novels: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. Other works and other types of labyrinthine narratives are also included, but the bulk of the analysis is of these three. Analyzing a novel as a textual labyrinth can be useful when deciphering a text: it is a comprehensive way of thinking about a literary work that can provide new insights into the story and structure. It considers the novel as experienced by the reader, who is no longer a passive observer, but an active participant. Because one of the roles of literature is to represent reality and offer insight into the workings of society, the symbol of the labyrinth as a complex but isolated structure can tell us something about how we view the individual and their place in the world – both when the maze symbolizes a person's psyche as well as when it tells us something about the external reality.

Labyrinths can be seen from a dual perspective: from within and from above. From within, the maze can look impossible to solve, but from above, the structure is clear, as all the paths are visible at once. When reading a labyrinthine novel, the reader is first like the wanderer, who is discovering the inside of the maze, but once they have finished the book,

[1] C.f. Penelope Reed Doob, The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1990), Wendy B. Faris, *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988).

they have presumably obtained a fuller understanding of the totality of the structure, as if seen from above. However, not all labyrinths, and not all textual labyrinths offer themselves to easy resolution – in fact, contemporary, postmodern labyrinths tend to evade completion and often have no exit. Because of this, they are at odds with the image of the labyrinth in the past. This is one of the reasons why postmodern labyrinths are so intriguing: they cause exasperation rather than provide revelation, through which they betray a certain despair and malaise felt in contemporary society. Postmodernism is not a place of optimism and clarity, and the literature it produces reflects that. Furthermore, postmodern literature and society are both individualistic, focused more on personal perception and experience than on the material reality in which these perceptions and experiences take place. Labyrinths are structures with walls that create a clear division between what is inside them, and what is without – they are isolated from whatever is out there. This is why they are particularly suitable for postmodern works of fiction that are preoccupied with a psychological look into the workings of a particular character's inner world. Most often, they do not concern themselves with the wider societal, cultural, political, or economic environment. On the other hand, their tendency to be unsolvable, unpleasant, and uncomfortable is indicative of a crisis in society that arises from extreme individualism.

Navigating a labyrinth often means having to make choices – which path to take and what turn to skip. When reading any novel, readers can choose to skip or skim certain parts, but the availability of choices is more prominent in labyrinthine texts. Postmodern labyrinthine novels create even more choices and force the reader into a previously unprecedented active role – the reader becomes a participant in guiding the narrative, which can create the illusion of co-creating the narrative. This is one of the ways in which postmodern textual labyrinths differ from such works written in the past. Postmodern labyrinthine novels are also deeply engaging and often have a strong and obsessive fan following. Partially because of their mystery and intrigue, and partially simply because they exist in a digital world, they have inspired countless online discussions, forums and blogs, where readers can engage in theorizing, analyzing, and deciphering the textual maze. This shows that literature has not been put at risk by the rising popularity of digital media; rather the internet is being used to disseminate literature. Furthermore, cyberspace itself can be seen as a type of labyrinth, and labyrinthine narratives are not restricted to literature – they can be found in movies, series, and video games.

Summary

The main objectives of this thesis are to analyze the three primary texts, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* in terms of their labyrinthicity and to discuss their place in postmodern society – how they reflect it and what they have to say about it. As I will demonstrate, the more a novel is labyrinthine, the less it comments on anything external to the maze – very labyrinthine novels tend to include very little social criticism. This has intensified as the decades have progressed, which is also the reason behind the order of the chapters in the thesis – they follow each other chronologically in order of publication, and the most recently written novel is also the most labyrinthine.

The first chapter provides some background to the idea of the labyrinth in history and literature. It discusses ancient labyrinthine structures and the myth that surrounds the most well-known of these buildings, the Cretan labyrinth. It also explains terminology used throughout the thesis and the etymology of the words 'labyrinth' and 'maze'. The second part of the chapter focuses on literary labyrinths and what it means for a book to be labyrinthine. The emphasis of is on the process of reading and the choices that literary labyrinths present to the readers, as well as on the relationships between the author, the characters, and the reader, who each play their role in navigating the maze. The meaning of centers in postmodern labyrinths and how these literary labyrinths might differ from those written in the past is discussed. The chapter also explores the tendency in postmodern novels to blur the lines between not only the external and internal, but also the real and fictional. It touches upon the role of entertainment and social criticism in postmodern labyrinths. Finally, the chapter includes a set of criteria that will be used to determine the extent to which a book can resemble a labyrinth.

Chapter II is a discussion of the labyrinthine characteristics of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. It starts by comparing the categories of encyclopedic and labyrinthine and shows why they are not mutually exclusive. This is followed by an analysis of the content and structure of the novel according to the criteria described in the first chapter. Examples from the book are used to point to labyrinthine characteristics such as side paths, dead ends, and twists and turns in the narrative, and how inclusion of symbols, songs, and script-like sections complicates not only the linearity of the narrative, but also the linearity of the reading process. Some attention is given to the novel's extensive online following, and

how the fans perceive the labyrinth, as well as to instances in the novel in which mazes and labyrinths are explicitly mentioned. The chapter explores how the labyrinthine structure and narrative are used to represent paranoia and loss of identity, and how these in turn reflect problems in the wider social structures. The role of irony is discussed, as well as the rebellious streak that is prominent in the novel. Furthermore, the chapter shows how use of an overly complicated labyrinthine structure that tends to not only be circular, winding, and forking, but also falls apart towards the end of the novel, is itself a criticism of dark and menacing postmodern labyrinths that have no center and cannot be solved – which offers a negative view of the society in which they are situated.

Chapter III focuses on David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*. The chapter explores how the novel parodies academia and uses different registers not only for comedic effect, but also to create a labyrinth of language. A large part of the discussion deals with the endnotes, which create forks on the reader's path through the maze: these forks create choices for the reader, which makes the reading process akin to exploring a labyrinth. One function of the endnotes is to add vast amounts of data, which is similar to the deluge of information we experience daily – in this, *Infinite Jest* is both prophetic and critical of contemporary society. Obsession with the media and addiction to television is discussed, as is the use of the labyrinthine metaphor in talking about addiction to drugs and various other substances that trap the sufferer in a dangerous maze. The circularity of the narrative and the open ending indicate that the maze of addiction is unsolvable. Furthermore, the chapter shows how the labyrinthine narrative, language and structure paint a picture of an individualistic society that places little value in interpersonal relationships and where most people live isolated, walled-off existences.

The fourth chapter is about Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, which is the most labyrinthine of the three novels discussed herein. It not only contains footnotes, endnotes, and various appendices; the linearity of the reading process is also disturbed by the way words, sentences and paragraphs are placed on the page to mimic winding, circular, or turning paths. The way the three main narrative lines develop and intersect is also labyrinthine, as is the use of three different fonts to differentiate between the paths. The novel deals with labyrinths in various ways, not only as physical structures, but also as a metaphor for a psychological journey into the self. The labyrinth is therefore used as a means to discover and resolve personal issues – however, like the previous two novels, the labyrinth here is menacing, which prevents the characters from finding a solution. In this, *House of*

Leaves unintentionally criticizes the impossibility of solving one's personal issues solely by exploring one's past. The chapter explores the paradoxical relationship between the highly organized structure of the novel as a textual labyrinth and the problematic, impossible labyrinths it describes – either physical or psychological.

The fifth chapter takes a detour from postmodern literature to first cover Choose Your Own Adventure Books, which are labyrinthine books for children. It also tackles non-textual labyrinthine narratives, such as TV series, where the main focus is on Netflix's *Bandersnatch*. The chapter further discusses the phenomenon of the internet in its connection to the labyrinthine metaphor. While traditional labyrinths were finite, self-contained structures, some contemporary labyrinthine manifestations play with the idea of infinity, which complicates the definition of a maze in our time. Finally, the chapter turns to cities, which are often described as labyrinthine, and provides a short discussion of two novels that include the image of the city as a maze, and how they deal with issues of anonymity and loneliness of a person surrounded by a mass of people. The role of control is discussed, as is personal freedom and how these important topics are used as entertainment tropes in postmodern labyrinthine narratives. Here too labyrinths are used as a means of isolating the individual, and the wanderer is sent on a journey which promises a solution and revelation, but turns out to be only dark and dangerous.

The concluding chapter focuses on role of social criticism in postmodern labyrinthine works and further elaborates on the notion that more labyrinthine works tend to be more self-reflexive, and what that tells us about postmodern society. It shows how while physical mazes and labyrinths have become less serious and more fun, the metaphor of a labyrinth in postmodernism has become more disturbing and negative. The use of the metaphor of a labyrinth *in malo* in combination with the use of parody and irony in postmodern narratives shows how individuals in postmodern society experience isolation and a lack of connection with their society. However, the use of the labyrinthine metaphor to represent infinity and the universe, as presented in chapter V, might offer a new perspective and a new direction for the development of labyrinths in the future.

Chapter I: The Immortal Maze

The metaphor of the labyrinth is based on the form and structure of its physical counterparts. Not all physical mazes look the same: they can vary significantly in terms of shape, material, size, and complexity; however, they are all instantly recognizable as mazes. This uncanny ability to encompass drastically different manifestations speaks to the strength of the idea of a labyrinth in cultures throughout history. It also necessitates an explanation of the various possible forms mazes and labyrinths can take, and to trace their development through history, which is one of the objectives of this chapter. Metaphorical mazes, too, can represent a variety of ideas and incorporate a range of meanings – some positive, some negative. In literature, labyrinths are discussed as a topic in both their physical form and as a metaphor – but literary works can also resemble labyrinths through their structure and narrative complexity, among other characteristics. The second part of this chapter therefore focuses on literary labyrinths, with a special emphasis on postmodernism, exploring the relationship between the two. It discusses characteristics of postmodern literature that have found their way into labyrinthine works and how that affects the idea of the labyrinth in postmodernism. The chapter includes a set of four criteria that can be helpful in determining the extent to which a novel or a literary text can be labyrinthine, and which will be referred to throughout the thesis.

Myths, Monsters, and Mazy Metaphors

The earliest labyrinths supposedly date from the Neolithic, a late period in the Stone Age. A recently discovered maze in Denmark is suggested to be 4900 years old,[2] and new labyrinths are still being built today: for almost five millennia, therefore, people have been creating and have been fascinated by these extraordinary structures. In 1922, W. H. Matthews wrote a ground-breaking book on labyrinths and mazes, which concerns itself primarily with the physical structures. It remains one of the key works on the subject and is referred to by practically all other works on labyrinths. Therefore, the basic idea of what constitutes a labyrinth and the existing types of labyrinths that Matthews sets out are also followed here – after all, the metaphor of the labyrinth and the labyrinthine texts that stem from the idea of the labyrinth are based on the physical form. Matthews distinguishes between two types of

[2] Charlotte Price Persson, "Did Stone Age people build a large labyrinth in Denmark?" *ScienceNordic*, 17 Feb. 2017, 8 July 2019 <http://sciencenordic.com/did-stone-age-people-build-large-labyrinth-denmark>.

labyrinths; unicursal and multicursal. According to Matthews, unicursal labyrinths "have only one path, without loops or branches",[3] while multicursal labyrinths are those that have forking paths that might come to dead ends. They are sometimes called puzzle labyrinths, as they present a challenge to the explorers, who must make a choice at each crossroads.

Penelope Reed Doob, whose important book concerns labyrinths from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, further elaborates that the unicursal labyrinth comes "from the visual arts and is part of popular culture rather than an exclusively learned model".[4] This is important because while numerous descriptions of labyrinths in texts suggest multicursality, the drawings in the Middle Ages – with very few exceptions – are of unicursal labyrinths. The intriguing part is that the drawings and other visual representations of the Cretan labyrinth, the myth of the Minotaur and the victory of Theseus, which were included in churches and in manuscripts, all depict the labyrinth as unicursal. Logically, as we know from the myth, this early labyrinth must have had branching paths. Therefore, one might conjecture that the symbol in the Middle Ages did not need correspond directly to the object – the artists and writers knew that the Cretan labyrinth they were describing was multicursal, but the accuracy of their representation in art was not considered to be significant. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the drawings do not represent the actual form of the labyrinth, but merely the correct path taken through it to make it to the center. It is also worth mentioning that unlike the labyrinths of the Antiquity, the Middle Age labyrinths, especially those that were created on the floors of churches, were intended to be unicursal. The path followed did not branch, and inevitably led to the center. The walker of the maze therefore did not wander – the journey took on a meditative meaning, or it was used to prove the pilgrim's patience.

For Reed Doob, the discrepancy between the visual unicursal mazes and the multicursal mazes they represent shows the power of the labyrinthine metaphor. Her book includes a discussion of mazes in medieval art and literature and includes four essays on early labyrinthine texts: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Chaucer's *House of Fame*. She looks for patterns that connect the four texts and discusses their intertextuality – something not found in the novels discussed herein. Furthermore, in the medieval era covered by Reed Doob, sinister and negative mazes were used primarily to represent bad morals and sinfulness, and there was a prominent religious aspect to the labyrinth that does not feature in postmodernism. As Reed Doob explains, the

[3] W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1922) 147.
[4] Reed Doob, 48.

adjective 'labyrinthine' was often used pejoratively to describe failed, overly complex works. However, in her reading of her chosen texts, Reed Doob does not see mazes as negative, and focuses on the journey to understanding and clarity. Her book also includes many characteristics of labyrinthine texts that remain relevant today: duality, circularity, and the importance of the reading process.

Unlike Reed Doob's book, this thesis concerns itself almost exclusively with multicursal labyrinths, which are the most popular modern form, and also best suited for labyrinthine fiction. One might even say that in order to classify a postmodern book as labyrinthine, the labyrinth *must* be multicursal – if the project of walking a unicursal labyrinth is to follow the path to the center/conclusion with patience in order to gain understanding or attain knowledge, then almost any book, or at least any book of sufficient length and complexity, could be conceived as a unicursal labyrinth. Furthermore, since the unicursal type is no longer popular, it would be difficult to compare anything postmodern to a form most commonly found in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Labyrinths as we imagine them today are multicursal almost without exception. They also sometimes include the threat of a monster, and almost inevitably contain danger. The notion of the monster is derived from the Cretan myth of Daedalus' maze, which is the most widely known story of the labyrinth. It is so prevalent that labyrinths are sometimes called 'domus daedali', and one of the synonyms for 'labyrinth' in French is '*dédale*', from the name of the most famous architect of mazes.

Labyrinths can also be classified as *in malo* or *in bono*, which how Reed Doob distinguishes between negative and positive types of mazes. Labyrinths *in bono* are spaces that provide understanding and peace: while they can be complicated and difficult, they have a solution that can be attained through patience and persistence. They offer a challenge, but they are intended to create a positive experience for those who enter. On the other hand, labyrinths *in malo* are darker and more sinister. They can be defined in this way because they contain a monster or some other threat that can endanger the wanderer, or because their structure and organization is such that they cannot be solved to satisfaction. As metaphors of either an individual's attempt to attain knowledge about themselves or the world in which they live, they therefore represent a failed journey. As will be demonstrated, postmodern mazes tend to be labyrinths *in malo.*

It is also useful to elaborate on the difference (or lack thereof) between the words 'labyrinth' and 'maze'. Henry Eliot writes that for some, "a labyrinth has one convoluted,

looping path and no choices, whereas a maze has forked paths, wrong turns and dead ends",[5] which would mean that labyrinths are unicursal and mazes are multicursal. Confusingly, we also often think of mazes as the puzzles we see in children's books, or the turf, hedge, or maize mazes that are meant purely for entertainment, and labyrinths as the mythical and dangerous places of death, such as the labyrinth in Crete. However, both Matthews and Reed Doob, as well as most other authors who write on the subject, use the terms interchangeably, as full synonyms. This is useful because otherwise one or the other of the two options might appear in a text dealing with the subject so many times as to make the reading experience tedious: or as Eliot pithily puts it, the "differences can be distracting".[6]

However, while used synonymously, the two words are of different origin; Matthews devotes an entire chapter to the topic. The etymology of 'maze' is quite straightforward: it comes from Middle English *masen,* which means to perplex or bewilder.[7] 'Labyrinth', however, is where things get complicated, or as Matthews puts it, when we turn to

> *labyrinthos*, transmitted practically intact from the ancient Greek to most modern European languages, we are venturing on dangerous ground indeed, for the derivation of this word has been the subject of much disputation between rival schools of etymologists and philologists in recent years.[8]

As Matthews continues, it might come from the Greek word *laura,* for passage, or mine. The word might also come from the Lydian word *labyrs,* meaning axe, which is the preferred albeit somewhat puzzling explanation. Reed Doob invokes the term *labor intus*, where the Latin *labor* means toil or trouble, and *intus* refers to within. This interpretation seems fitting, even though it is not etymologically sound. Similarly to the word 'maze', it means something puzzling and difficult which can be entered and which may bewilder; an apt description for not only the physical structures, but for the metaphorical and literary labyrinths as well.

According to historical sources, there were four ancient labyrinths; the Cretan labyrinth, the Egyptian labyrinth, the Etruscan labyrinth, and the labyrinth in Lemnos. The great labyrinth in Egypt was said to be an enormous structure, perhaps a palace, filled with many objects and constructed in a way that would bewilder visitors. It might have been a sepulcher, and as opposed to the labyrinth in Crete, the walls were not bare – the Egyptian labyrinth was said to be richly adorned. One of the most extensive accounts on this amazing

[5] Henry Eliot, *Follow This Thread: A Maze Book to Get Lost In* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2018), 10.
[6] Eliot, 11.
[7] "maze", etymology, *Wiktionary*, July 10 2019 <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/maze>.
[8] Matthews, 228

structure is given by Herodotus, who wrote that "the Labyrinth … surpasses even the Pyramids."[9] It was also at least partially subterranean, with one above-ground and one below-ground level. Pliny wrote of this labyrinth that "[c]ertain of the halls are arranged in such a way that as one throws open the door there arises within a fearful noise of thunder".[10] The accuracy of these reports is discussed by Alan B. Lloyd, who suggests that the existence of the Egyptian labyrinth has been indicated by various archaeological excavations. However, what often matters more is the myth.

No myth of a labyrinth is greater than the Cretan one. It is not necessary to recount the story here; however, some attributes of Daedalus's structure are worth mentioning. Firstly, Reed Doob states that according to Pliny, the Cretan labyrinth was a "markedly inferior copy"[11] of the Egyptian. However, it is not the Egyptian labyrinth that is best known today: regardless of its architectural inferiority, the myth of the Cretan labyrinth surpasses that of the Egyptian. This suggests the importance of a story: we either do not know of a compelling narrative attached to the labyrinth in Egypt, or else such a story has not survived. On the other hand, the names of Minos, Pasiphae, Ariadne, Theseus, the Minotaur, and perhaps most importantly Daedalus have survived through the millennia. Their names and myth are known, and with them, the labyrinth. In a journal article, Antonis Kotsonas even argues the labyrinth never existed, but was rather an abstract story that people only started believing much later.[12] But because of the strength of the myth, the reality might now never be known. Indeed, the myth of the Cretan labyrinth is so dominant that a lot of people are not even familiar with the other ancient mazes: the labyrinth in Lemnos, of which we know almost nothing, and the Etruscan labyrinth, which housed the tomb of Lars Porsenna, the king of Clusium.[13] Because of its function as a final resting place and its ornateness, the latter is similar to the Egyptian maze.

According to some sources, the labyrinth in Crete might have been a system of caves.[14] Reed Doob writes that "[t]he association of mazes with caves occurs periodically in

[9] Quoted in Alan B. Lloyd, "The Egyptian Labyrinth," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Aug. 1970: 82.
[10] Quoted in Lloyd, 86.
[11] Reed Doob, 21.
[12] Antonis Kotsonas, "A Cultural History of the Cretan Labyrinth: Monument and Memory from Prehistory to the Present", *American Journal of Archaeology* 122.3 July 2018: 367-396.
[13] Reed Doob, 20.
[14] Matthews, 45. Also Steve Connor, "Has the original Labyrinth been found?" *The Independent*, 16 Oct. 2009, 10 July 2019 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture/has-the-original-labyrinth-been-found-1803638.html>.

classical and medieval literature."[15] In her discussion of caves as labyrinths, Wendy Faris makes the connection with the sexual and the feminine.[16] The nexus between caves and labyrinths is significant because it shows these structures as being underground; many of the labyrinths and labyrinthine buildings from the three novels which we will discuss are also underground, contrary to the standard perception of mazes as something built on the surface. However, I agree with Matthews who claims that most often, caves are described as labyrinthine *metaphorically*: they are not constructed labyrinths, but natural formations that invoke the idea of the labyrinth. He applies the same to forests, and maintains that in discussing labyrinths, "we must limit ourselves to works of artifice".[17] Literary labyrinths are obviously all human-made; to imply otherwise would be absurd: on the other hand, they are also very much a metaphor for the physical structures. They are the *idea* of a labyrinth come to life on the pages and through stories in books.

Mapping Literary Labyrinths

Essentially, textual labyrinths are texts that mimic the structure and characteristics of physical mazes. Most importantly, labyrinthine texts have a labyrinthine narrative, which means that the reading experience resembles meandering through a maze. There are other characteristics to consider, however, and at least as far as novels are concerned, a labyrinthine narrative is the most important. This has to do with the process; exploring a physical labyrinth is a process of discovery, which is mimicked by the reading process, as the reader follows the story and the characters (who might also be making their way through a maze). If we keep our focus on multicursal types, this additionally means that literary labyrinths have a complex structure composed of an entrance, an exit, and multiple routes along which decisions have to be made. In terms of novels, the entrance and exit are obviously the beginning and end of the text. As far as multicursality is concerned, the first choice the reader makes is to start reading. They can also always "exit" the labyrinth by closing the book. In his article on Thomas Pynchon, Mark D. Hawthorne notes the following:

> one problem with the verbal multicursal labyrinth is that, while the outcome depends on the moral or psychological nature of the wanderer, the reader follows the

[15] Reed Doob, 21.
[16] Faris, 191.
[17] Matthews, 235.

> wanderer's pathway as a linear progression; the reader, unlike the wanderer, cannot determine progress or make choices to alter the outcome.[18]

According to Hawthorne, the reader cannot influence the narrative: however, this is only partially true. As we will see, the structure of some labyrinthine novels does allow for a certain degree of direct reader participation in the course the narrative will take; this is the case in *House of Leaves* and to a lesser extent *Infinite Jest*. Furthermore, there are books, mainly meant for children, which were created in a way that allows the readers to participate in guiding the plot; in gamebooks, also known choose your own adventure books, the reader takes on the role of the hero, and the outcome can vary depending on the choices they make. Other non-literary fictional narratives are also often dependent on the participation of those who are experiencing the story; for example, in many video games the player's decisions are crucial for the various paths the narrative can take, and many video games resemble mazes or even use them as their theme. Furthermore, in the episode of the popular Netflix series *Black Mirror* entitled *Bandersnatch*, viewers, traditionally considered as passive as readers, make choices which guide the storyline. With its labyrinthine structure, *Bandersnatch* potentially heralds a new genre for television.

In textual labyrinths, the reader, the author, and the fictional characters all have a role. The reader is the wanderer; they explore the novel as if it were a labyrinth, following the paths to the end, experiencing the story: the wandering of an adventurer in a physical labyrinth is mimicked by the reading process. In *The Pleasure of the Text,* Roland Barthes writes that "we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the *integrity* of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages".[19] In labyrinthine texts, where the varied and branching narrative lines or the inclusion of endnotes, footnotes or appendices create forks for readers, this skimming and skipping is even more common – the labyrinthine structure often requires readers to make decision on what to read and what to skip. Furthermore, a rhythm is also created by the unorthodox placement of words on the page, through the changes in fonts and by the addition of songs, letters, scripts and other media. The reader's own rhythm is therefore at least partially influenced by the structure of the text.

Still, the reader can always choose how to read the novel: instead of doing a straightforward reading, they can decide to delve deeper, analyze critically, or look around

[18] Mark D. Hawthorne, "Pynchon's Early Labyrinths", *College Literature* 25.2 Spring, 1998: 79.
[19] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998) 11. Italics original.

every corner. Obviously, books need to be prone to be read as labyrinths, meaning that they must have some labyrinthine characteristics; but a reader can either ignore those, decide to explore them in detail, or let themselves get lost. Sometimes, making various path choices can lead to missing certain turns, or even skipping entire paragraphs, which resembles the movements of a wanderer in a physical labyrinth. Furthermore, what all labyrinthine narratives have in common is that they also represent a sort of puzzle for the reader to solve – it is perhaps not surprising that all three main novels have a very strong fan following and that numerous online forums, boards, and blogs are dedicated to the works. In those, readers can discuss their ideas and thoughts, as well as attempt to dissect and unravel the complex storylines or discover hidden meanings.

The characters can also be wanderers, but of a different kind: notably it is the characters who encounter the danger. Terror, a crucial part of the Cretan labyrinth myth, is caused by the threat of being killed by the monster, the Minotaur, but even a labyrinth with no monster lurking inside can be hazardous. The threat of getting lost forever and perishing in the endless corridors is a significant trope in recent labyrinthine fiction. Many contemporary works also deal with psychological labyrinths that exist within a character's mind, and are connected either to childhood trauma, addiction, or other forms of mental health issues. Literature has the power to represent the workings of society and criticize its failings, and by placing characters in unsolvable and dangerous labyrinths *in malo* (where reality itself is often questioned) postmodern labyrinthine literature unintentionally points to unresolved issues and problems in our society.

In the reader-character-writer relationship, the latter represents the architect. The author is Daedalus, who creates the story, the structure and the narrative. Much like Daedalus in some versions of the Cretan myth, the author can also find it difficult to navigate their own labyrinth. Stories can get out of hand; the structure may form a trap for its creator. However, for a novel to be truly labyrinthine, it must have an organized structure, and must therefore be consciously constructed. An author whose textual labyrinth is not understandable even to them has failed in their task. Such a novel is still a labyrinth, but, as we will see with *Gravity's Rainbow*, the narrative lines can disintegrate much like a crumbling building. Overall, the author and authorial intent does not feature especially prominently in this thesis: it is possible to analyze a text as a labyrinth without the author ever intending it to *be* a labyrinth. On the other hand, the structure having been created by an author means that they cannot be ignored.

Some critics contend that more recent labyrinthine fiction lacks a center so characteristic of physical labyrinths; absent is the core that houses the Minotaur, or the central refuge where a wanderer in a hedge maze can finally sit and relax. The center in contemporary fictional labyrinths can either be non-existent, or there can be multiple centers, or the center may exist, but be of no particular significance. In his article on Robbe-Grillet, Ben Stoltzfus writes that "[u]nlike their ancient paradigms, contemporary labyrinths seem to have no center, offer few solutions, and provide even fewer exits".[20] Reed Doob claims that the lack of a center might add to the danger contained in the labyrinth: "[o]ne cannot take centers for granted in the labyrinths of our own century: perhaps the fear that there is no center after all is part of the terror of the maze".[21] The obvious question is why are contemporary postmodern labyrinths centerless and unnerving, and the answer might indicate unresolved issues in postmodern society. However, not all physical labyrinths of the past had a central point, and what is even more important, the "fact that mazes have centers does not imply that every maze walker *knows* there is a center: maze-walkers may not even know they are in a maze, especially when it is a metaphorical one".[22]

Postmodern literary labyrinths, or at least the three primary texts discussed in this thesis, have several distinct features, some of which are directly related to characteristics of postmodern fiction. The uncertainty of what is real and what is not, the fragmentation of these texts, the paradoxes they exhibit, as well as how maximalist they are, all fits well with the idea of the labyrinth, and make them labyrinthine in a new, postmodern sense. They tend to parody reality, and use irony to attempt to make sense of chaos; these are also characteristics of twisted labyrinths which attempt to subvert rather than explain or represent material reality. In several examples, most notably in *House of Leaves*, what was thought to be external is revealed to in fact be internal – not a representation of the external world, but of the protagonist's inner struggle. Labyrinths can be used as a good way to show how in postmodern texts, the individual and their individual interpretation of their reality takes precedence over the external, material reality. However, this does little to accurately portray the world in which these characters reside, and does even less to comment on society outside the fictional universe of the novel. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson writes that "art does not seem in our society to offer any direct

[20] Ben Stoltzfus, "Robbe-Grillet's Labyrinths: Structure and Meaning", *Contemporary Literature* 22.3. Summer 1981: 296.
[21] Reed Doob, 55.
[22] Reed Doob, 55.

access to reality … what looks like realism turns out at best to offer unmediated access only to what we think about reality, to our images and ideological stereotypes about it".[23] This holds true for many postmodern novels, and in the novels addressed in this thesis, the symbol of the labyrinth is sometimes used to create a boundary between the individual and their surroundings, which has an isolating effect and results in prioritizing a private interpretation without questioning how accurately this interpretation reflects reality itself.

However, one should not forget that postmodern labyrinths are also *fun.* They are not entertaining in the same way that garden hedge mazes are entertaining, providing a place for relaxation and reflection. They are also not like the simple divertissement of a mirror maze. On the simplest level, postmodern labyrinths, like all novels, provide entertainment for the reader; however, they do it in a way that is often farcical, and the entertainment itself is sometimes subverted and twisted only to show the absurdity of our obsession with it. A part of what creates this obsession in the readers is the novels' complexity and puzzling structure – enthusiastic readers want to discover every turn, walk down every possible path and not miss any dead end – all of which motivates them to return to the maze and read and re-read the books. It is the fun of it mixed with the anxiety of missing out.

Uncertainty is another recurring postmodernist feature that weaves forking paths and instills curiosity and sometimes breeds discomfort. Sometimes, it appears in a form that confuses the characters who are not always sure what is real and what is not – within their fictional universe or outside it. In his essay on Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" Ethan Weed calls such layering of the real with the fictional "labyrinthine allusions",[24] an apt description which complicates and diversifies the already existing complexity of postmodern fictional mazes. Sometimes, the uncertainty functions as a tool to confuse the readers; references to real persons or texts in the novels that are mixed in with fictional references further wind the reader's path. These references can be interpreted as dead ends, where the reader peeks down a corridor they choose not to take; or, the reader can try to find out if the works or people referenced in the novel exist outside the book. At each such mention, the path splits. Weed spends a substantial amount of time speculating about the accuracy and reality of a quote that is featured in the story and which might or might not have come from a real book; the author cited is real but the book is not. This shows how the labyrinthine text

[23] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992) 150.
[24] Ethan Weed, "A Labyrinth of Symbols: Exploring 'The Garden of Forking Paths'", *Variaciones Borges* 2004: 167.

can function differently for different critics and readers. The choices we make dictate how much time we spend dwelling on a chapter, paragraph, or sentence of a literary labyrinth.

Labyrinthine Characteristics of Literary Texts

All definitions of what makes a labyrinthine text have the following in common: the texts are winding, forking, circular, they can be puzzling and even disorienting, they confuse and amaze the reader, and they at times launch them on a monotonous and repetitive storylines that come to dead ends. Weed writes that "reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth",[25] however, this definition is too wide. While reading any text might create a labyrinthine experience for the reader, in order to truly classify a text as a postmodern literary labyrinth, further criteria must be applied. For the purposes of this study, four main labyrinthine characteristics will be used to help analyze the three primary texts as labyrinthine. The objective of these is to make the findings clearer and easier to convey. However, the criteria discussed are not the only ways in which a text can resemble a maze. Labyrinthine characteristics already discussed in the preceding paragraphs can supplement these four more rigid criteria. It is also important to mention that not all books must comply with all of these criteria in order to be discussed in the context of labyrinthine fiction. A discussion of a failed labyrinth or a book that is close to being labyrinthine can also benefit from the foundations provided here.

Labyrinthine Narrative

Narrative is the most important feature of literary labyrinths. This includes complexity; multiple narratives, forked story lines, as well as an abundance of characters. Labyrinthine stories give the impression of winding back and forth, sometimes jumping through time or bumping against dead ends. They seem circular and often pursue a goal or search for a center. Often, they include a sense of dread and danger. To the reader, they may seem confusing; however, the structure must have certain intentionality. Labyrinths are organized, even when they seem chaotic. There is a line running through them, much like a thread. J. Hillis Miller views the two as interconnected; "thread and labyrinth, thread intricately crinkled to and fro as the retracing of the labyrinth which defeats the labyrinth but makes another intricate web

[25] Weed, 162.

at the same time",[26] using the narrative line as a way to solve the labyrinth. I argue that there is another line that winds itself through the maze; the reading process, which both follows the thread and traces a path. This means that getting lost is possible, which may be due to the complexity of the narrative, confusing and convoluting storylines, or a multiplicity of characters and events, but can also happen because of the structure.

Labyrinthine Structure on the Page

This is the most "physical" criterion, meaning that it concerns how the words, sentences and paragraphs are arranged on the pages. It is not something that is written about in regards to older labyrinthine texts; the phenomenon of physically structuring a printed novel as labyrinthine is a postmodern feature. It is less obvious in some novels, more in others, but nevertheless worth our attention. Some of it concerns word placement: sentences and words are printed not in lines left to right, but upside-down, sideways, or in curves on the page; sometimes, this forces the reader to turn the book sideways or upside-down as they read, interfering with the normal reading rhythm. A reader who has been following the lines left to right who suddenly finds that the text has narrowed because a song is included on the page, has to suddenly follow that path, and read the song; or choose to skip it. A good example of this sort of labyrinthine book is Henry Eliot's *Follow This Thread*, which is not only a labyrinth-on-page but also a short history and discussion of mazes and labyrinths and those who build them. The winding and turning lines of text are even accompanied by a red thread that runs through the entire book. It has a center, and it ends upside-down, as if inviting the reader to re-enter the labyrinth. It is not its narrative, but the way the text is arranged on each page that resembles a maze. One of the books discussed in this thesis, *House of Leaves*, plays similar tricks on the reader.

Fonts can also function to change the reader's path; different sizes and shapes of words can represent a new fork, or create a new turn. The same goes for the uses of symbols, numbers, equations, and similar non-verbal communication. This criterion includes pictures, drawings, and other visuals, as well as various letters, poems, or songs, lists, and other textual inclusions. For example, the various appendices, collages, and exhibits that appear in *House of Leaves* are labyrinthine features in a very physical sense. They often involve the reader flipping back and forth through pages, simulating a path or multiple paths taken through a

[26] J. Hillis Miller, "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line", *Critical Inquiry* 3.1 autumn, 1976: 62.

labyrinth, some of which help propel the narrative, and some of which end with a blank wall. Another feature with which the reader must interact in a physical sense, and which resembles forks and dead ends, are footnotes and endnotes. One of the books considered here, *Gravity's Rainbow*, does not have them; indeed, they are not absolutely necessary for a novel to be labyrinthine. Still, they are an obvious postmodern labyrinthine feature. Having to flip to the very end to read an endnote in *Infinite Jest*, not knowing if it will be a sentence, a paragraph, or an extra chapter, adds to the intrigue. Footnotes function similarly in *House of Leaves*. In both novels following the tiny superscript number can lead to something crucial to the narrative, or simply to a dead end: the reason they are so important is that they offer the reader a choice. They can always skip the footnotes, and refuse to flip to the end for the endnotes, as if skipping a fork in the road.

Labyrinthine Language

The use of various styles and forms of language adds to the complexity of the labyrinth and creates turns and changes in the narrative. Slang, jargon, technical terminology and varied registers can be difficult to follow, or even puzzle the reader. On the other hand, they can be used to help differentiate between the various storylines. A sudden shift in register can indicate a new path in the narrative; a shift from elegant and ornate writing to clumsy and coarse splits the line. As Katharine Cox points out, repetition also plays a part: "[r]epetition and tracery are important motifs within such linguistic labyrinths where encounters with the spirals of language lead inevitably to multiple intertextual comprehensions and palimpsests of meaning".[27] Puns and jokes have a similar function, as does wordplay. Stoltzfus stresses Robbe-Grillet's "*play* with language [which] provides liberating passageways to the outside, stressing the author's freedom and the reader's option to take advantage of this opening".[28] Labyrinthine language can therefore trap and liberate, confuse as well as explain.

Labyrinthine Plot Elements

And finally, there are various mentions and inclusions of labyrinths, either physical or metaphorical, in the text. This concerns novels in which the plot includes a labyrinth. It is by no means necessary for a book to include labyrinths as part of its story, and as we will see,

[27] Katharine Cox, *Labyrinths: Navigating Daedalus' Legacy. The Role of Labyrinths in Selected Contemporary Fiction,* 2005, University of Hull: 23.
[28] Stoltzfus, 299. Italics original.

not all labyrinthine novels do; however, it does add to the complexity when a novel not only has a labyrinthine narrative, structure, and language, but also talks about mazes. Using the labyrinth as a plot element can provide valuable insight into how reality is represented in postmodern fiction. The idea of a labyrinth can therefore represent the connection (or lack thereof) between an individual and the society in which they live. Furthermore, labyrinths can be used as a metaphor to represent various personal toils of characters as well as vices they cannot escape. On the other hand, a labyrinth can also symbolically represent a positive journey to understanding.

The image of the labyrinth as both a structure and a symbol has existed for millennia and the metaphor of the maze has been used throughout history to represent something complicated, either in the positive or negative sense. Numerous works of literature written in the past have been described as labyrinthine because of their narrative form and the way in which they engage with the reader. However, during the last century with the advent of postmodernism, the previous definition of what makes a literary labyrinth has been somewhat modified: contemporary labyrinthine texts incorporate features of postmodernism to create mazes that are not only enormous and exceedingly complex (sometimes beyond comprehension), but also more menacing. They contain more irony, question reality and focus extensively on the individual. The use of endnotes and footnotes along with forking narrative lines and inclusion of symbols and other media forces the reader to modify their rhythm of reading as well as make choices during their reading process. In this, postmodern labyrinths more closely resemble physical multicursal mazes than labyrinthine texts written in the past.

Chapter II: The Circular Ruins of War

“"*Gravity’s Rainbow*" is bonecrushingly dense, compulsively elaborate, silly, obscene, funny, tragic, pastoral, historical, philosophical, poetic, grindingly dull, inspired, horrific, cold, bloated, beached and blasted”[29] wrote Richard Locke in his 1973 review, the same year the novel was published. The novel has also been described as genius, as well as at times tiresome, complicated and obsessive, sexually charged, even apocalyptic. As will be shown below, while far from being a perfect labyrinth, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is an extremely effective one, dragging the characters and readers alike into a complex universe of strangeness, paranoia, resistance to power, and entertainment. Its labyrinthine narrative lines are difficult to navigate, and contain numerous side-stories that not only further complicate the maze, but also create space for cultural and social criticism. As I will show, the labyrinthine metaphor is used in connection to laboratory mazes to convey the idea of control over people, and irony is used to point to various issues in post-war society and beyond – in this, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is very effective. However, irony by itself can do little beyond exposing problems. Similarly, labyrinthine narrative lines and language point out absurdity in the world, but as they are themselves overly convoluted and confusing, they do not provide a way out of the maze. Through this, the novel is critical of the very idea of a labyrinth, which can mirror a failing society, but offers no solutions. This conclusion is fortified by the fact that with the progression of the novel, the structure falls apart – the final image is that of impending doom, albeit one accompanied by cheerful song.

The novel is so vast that even its own creator had trouble making sense of the various storylines. Thomas Pynchon spent a significant amount of time constructing *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Its publication followed the writer’s seven year absence from the literary scene, during which time he was presumably working on the novel. It is impossible to be sure – his private life remains a mystery, and not much is available on his process of writing the book. Sources frequently refer to an article by Jules Siegel, published in Playboy Magazine in 1977, in which Pynchon reportedly told Siegel "I was so fucked up while I was writing it . . . that now I go back over some of those sequences and I can't figure out what I could have meant".[30] This can serve as the root of the argument that the labyrinth of *Gravity’s Rainbow*

---

[29] Richard Locke, review of *Gravity’s Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon in *The New York Times* 11 Mar 1973, 22 July 2019 <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>
[30] Maud Newton, “Jules Siegel on Pynchon’s Wife” *Maud Newton Blog,* 28 Mar. 2014, 1 Dec. 2019, <http://maudnewton.com/blog/jules-siegel-on-pynchons-wife/>.

is imperfect – it is elaborate and complex, but it also has the ability to swallows some of its main characters as well as the architect. That does not make it any less labyrinthine, since according to some sources, even Daedalus had trouble navigating his own creation.[31] It simply means that it is we would call a labyrinth *in malo*; "terrifying, threatening, and suited to the ugly and negative overtones of *cacemphaton*".[32]

While *Gravity's Rainbow* is often described as an encyclopedic novel, it is also frequently called labyrinthine. Siegel wrote about "the mysterious Pynchon and his labyrinthine allegories," which confuse the literary world. Jesting about Pynchon's famously hidden private life, he even implied that the writer himself might be merely an "elaborate hoax … like the hallucinatory inventions of Argentina's blind fabulist, Jorge Luis Borges".[33] In his book *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon,* David Seed writes that, along with the term 'mosaic', the terms 'labyrinth' and 'maze' function "as reflexive metaphors of the novel's own assembly".[34] In *The Philosophical Baroque: On Autopoietic Modernities*, Erik Roraback, writing about *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses*, states that "one would still be hard put to pin these texts into any particular canonical narrative form or descriptive category",[35] precisely because of their complexity and tendency to elude a traditional straightforward reading. On the other hand, Edward Mendelson, who wrote extensively on Pynchon, places the novel in the encyclopedic genre. The labyrinthine and the encyclopedic are closely related and often used to describe the same books (*Infinite Jest*, as we will see, is another example, as is Joyce's *Ulysses*). I argue that while there are differences between the two, they are not mutually exclusive. According to Mendelson, an encyclopedic novel is one that includes vast amounts of information. Additionally, it is an "encyclopedia of literary styles",[36] which is also a labyrinthine characteristic, as is the propensity to include multiple languages. This is all true of *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Mendelson remarks, "[e]ncyclopedic narrative identifies itself not by a single plot or structure, but by encompassing a broad set of qualities."[37] While encyclopedic and labyrinthine fiction have much in common, describing a novel as labyrinthine focuses not only on the content of the novel and the narrative structure, but also

---

[31] Reed Doob, 12 and 27. Also Laura Knight-Jadczyk, *The Secret History of the World and How to Get Out Alive*, (Otto: Red Pill Press, 2005) 290.
[32] Kathleen M. Coleman, "Cacemphaton in the Labyrinth: Ovid, Heroides 10.71," *Mnemosyne* 63.2, 2010, 284.
[33] Jules Siegel, "Who Is This Thomas Pynchon... and Why Did He Take Off with My Wife?" *Playboy Magazine March* 1977. 22 July 2019. <https://www.waste.org/mail/?list=pynchon-l&month=9505&msg=1496&keywords=siegal>
[34] David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988) 178.
[35] Erik S. Roraback, *The Philosophical Baroque: On Autopoietic Modernities,* (Brill: Leiden, 2017): 127.
[36] Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon", *MLN* 91.6 Dec. 1976: 1271.
[37] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative", 1272.

on the use of labyrinths as a plot device, the use of metaphorical mazes, and how the story is structured on the page. Being described as labyrinthine does not disqualify a novel from being considered encyclopedic, or indeed any other descriptive form; it merely adds a new perspective and offers a different way of viewing it.

The literary labyrinth of *Gravity's Rainbow* is not easy to navigate. As F. S. Schwarzbach puts it, "the labyrinthine complications of the story are virtually impossible to understand, often even to follow".[38] *Gravity's Rainbow* is not the type of labyrinth that can be easily seen from above, which a reader could fully understand once they have finished reading. The reasons for this are various: not only does the labyrinth collapse towards the end, but the entire labyrinthine structure is at times simply too convoluted. It is also because of the sheer complexity of the narrative, which includes a large number of dead ends. The almost self-contained side stories, such as the one about Byron the Bulb, take the reader on new paths. Byron the Bulb serves to further condense the feelings of paranoia about conspiracies: as Patrick McHugh writes, "the story is an allegory of the conflicts of discourse and power that the novel as a whole explores more fully and historically".[39] The tale of the immortal light bulb is also so ridiculous that the overall effect is that resistance might also be ridiculous and futile: while Byron sets out to take down the light bulb cartel, the story ends with failure, and with Byron living a lonely underground existence. As a labyrinthine feature, this story also further complicates the narrative, because it is one of those numerous references to the outside non-fictional world that a reader could follow as if following a new path branching off in the labyrinth. Research by Markus Krajewski, summarized in an article in *The Paris Review* by Dan Piepenbring, does just that; it connects the story to a real light bulb cartel, and a real meeting, where "companies colluded, it turns out, to engineer incandescent lightbulbs with dramatically attenuated life spans".[40] This story can therefore pull the reader even further into the labyrinth of blurred fictional and real meanings, in addition to functioning as cultural and social criticism. As Seed writes, "*Gravity's Rainbow* is a work which is constantly referring outside itself".[41] This can result in a feeling of uncertainty experienced by the reader when they are tasked with discerning that which is real

[38] F.S. Schwarzbach, "A Matter of Gravity", *Pynchon: a collection of critical essays,* ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978) 60.
[39] Patrick McHugh, "Cultural Politics, Postmodernism, and White Guys: Affect in "Gravity's Rainbow", *College Literature* 28.2 spring, 2001: 16.
[40] Dan Piepenbring, "Planned Obsolescence," *The Paris Review*, 7 Oct. 2014, 26 July 2019, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/10/07/planned-obsolescence/>.
[41] Seed, 210.

from that which is fictional, a feature that is characteristic of postmodern novels and labyrinthine literature alike.

Another such reference and turn outside the novel is the Hansel and Gretel re-enactment story in which Blicero enlists Katje and later Greta. Note that in the original story by the Brothers Grimm, Hansel and Gretel must find their path through the woods, and use breadcrumbs as a sort of Ariadne's thread to show them the way out. They also encounter a witch, a monster which they defeat – which invokes a connection to the myth of the labyrinth. Seed points out that Blicero forces the re-enactment of this story because he is "driven by the need for a reassuring pattern to stave off the war's contingency", but "[a]cting out these roles involves impersonation, as Greta realizes, and ultimate self-destruction."[42] This is so throughout the entire novel: the roles taken on by characters often lead to disaster and sometimes even cause them, as is the case with Tyrone Slothrop, to lose their sense of identity. The story of the transcendence of the aptly named Lyle Bland also branches off from the main narrative and ends in self-destruction, but of a more meditative kind. Bland pops up throughout the novel in connection to the Jamf conspiracy and Slothrop's origins; he is "the man [who] has had his meathooks well into the American day-to-day since 1919".[43] He becomes a part of the mysterious Masons, learns how to transcend his own physical body, and finally leaves it for good. Some of the other branched-off stories, like the story of the Herero tribe, continually connect back to the main narrative and form an essential part of the plot. Others, like "the relatively self-contained chapter 34 which revolves around Stalin's compulsory introduction of literacy among the peoples of Central Asia in the 1920s"[44] serve to make a political point. Furthermore, they all branch and complicate the already convoluted narrative by adding extra characters, events, and references to real history and politics mixed in with the imagined and the hallucinated.

These side stories that send the reader down paranoid paths also serve as social criticism of the paranoia-inducing political and economic structures – throughout the novel, the mysterious *they* serve the represent a system of authoritarian oppression that cares more about winning the war than the people who fight the battles. However, the use of convoluted labyrinthine narrative lines to represent opposition to the system indicates unease about direct resistance. The style of parody and absurdity betrays the worry that resistance might be ridiculous – the paranoia is therefore not connected only to the fear of the system, but also the

[42] Seed, 166.
[43] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage Books, 2000) 687.
[44] Seed, 184.

anxiety of failure. The novel also shows that the enemy is not only the enemy on the other side of one's pointed rifle, but also the one who ordered the rifle to be taken up in the first place, and that the system is trying to exert control not only over those it fights, but also those doing the fighting in its name – it is a maze of power relations which can swallow any one individual, regardless of the side they choose. The attitude of resistance against "The Man" permeates *Gravity's Rainbow*, but the labyrinth that it creates essentially teaches powerlessness. Slothrop, who is the closest the novel comes to having a protagonist, learns this lesson as the novel progresses – and the effect on his psyche is that of growing paranoia and eventual disintegration. The labyrinthine structure of the novel mirrors his quest for the truth about his own past, leaving the reader to question Slothrop's place in the novel as much as Slothrop questions his own role in the conspiracies that plague him.

Linda A. Westervelt, who also calls the novel labyrinthine,[45] but more formally classifies it as encyclopedic, correctly notes that the revelation by the spokesman for the Counterforce, when he claims that they "were never that concerned with Slothrop *qua* Slothrop"[46] causes the reader to be "frustrated rather than merely surprised because the disclaimer leaves him [sic] in a "*cul de sac"* and uncertain how to regard Slothrop."[47] This labyrinthine dead end is yet another feature, a trick of the novel that plays with the reader, leaving them at times frustrated and at other times surprised. Another revelation early in the novel, where we realize that Pointsman and Roger are less important than Slothrop[48] is another such characteristic, this time representing a sharp turn in the narrative labyrinth. The reader's attempt to follow the narrative path is often thwarted by such turns, following the characters who are themselves getting lost. There are many wanderers in the maze: the plethora of characters caught up in "the paranoid labyrinth",[49] as Thomas Moore calls it, diversifies and complicates the structure.

The complexity of the novel is further intensified by the uses of various symbols and differences in font sizes, as well as the use of other forms of communication, such as songs and letters. In their journal article, Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight point out the "unusual frequency [with which] the prose of *Gravity's Rainbow* is interrupted by song

---

[45] Linda A. Westervelt, "A Place Dependent on Ourselves": The Reader as System-Builder in *Gravity's Rainbow* ", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22.1 Spring 1980: 83.
[46] Pynchon, 876.
[47] Westervelt, 71-72.
[48] Westervelt, 71.
[49] Thomas Moore, *The Style of Connectedness* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987) 69.

lyrics, and by numerous allusions to popular, classical, operatic, and ethnic music".[50] They point out that music is but one of the "access routes into Pynchon's astonishing, inexhaustible cosmos" alongside "rocketry, science, and love, to name but three".[51] As they say, music serves to emphasize the gentler, creative side of humanity that offers a respite from the otherwise depressing or destructive plot lines. The song lyrics in Pynchon are also often funny or satirical and as such, they add to the humorous aspect of the novel. Furthermore, because they interrupt the otherwise linear prose, they create physical, on-the-page distractions for the reader. The songs on pages 638 and 813, for example, also feature curly and square brackets and a change in font size. The curly brackets, which are especially large, point to comments on the song, written in smaller font. In these, the narrator, who thus inserts themselves into the song, almost directly addresses the reader. These are not obvious crossroads or branches; however, they do complicate and diversify the labyrinth. Other insertions of symbols have a similar effect, such as the image of a pointing finger on page 670, which shows the way to the rocket cartel, and the target on page 739, which Slothrop realizes is also the rocket from below. There are also the equations on page 166 and page 534, the latter of which is a graffito on the wall in the story and a diversification method on the page of the book. This intertwines the paths of the story with the journey of the reader's eyes on the page and intensifies the non-linearity of the labyrinthine form.

Much like the aforementioned songs, the use of dialogue that looks as if it was pulled from a script or an interview is another technique that further complicates the maze. An example of this can be found on page 876, where the words "INTERVIEWER" and "SPOKESMAN" are both in capital letters. The conversation between PISCES and Slothrop on pages 72 and 73 is written much like it would be in a movie script. These pages are preceded by a letter referencing the Kenosha Kid, which also functions to diversify the lines on the page. This section of the book, complete with Slothrop's trip down the toilet, is especially intriguing when regarded as a maze. The Q&A on page 82 and the letters on pages 70, 71, and 83, as well the constant breaks in the page to include short snippets centered in the middle force the reader's eye to travel non-linearly. At other points, large, uninterrupted chunks of prose create a flow that the reader follows like a path; yet elsewhere the use of italics, ellipses, dashes or other punctuation create what Moore calls a "rippling and

[50] Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of "*Gravity's Rainbow*"," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85.3 July 1986: 366.
[51] Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight, 384.

blurring".[52] And the passage on page 750 that Moore is describing, much like numerous others, is varied not only by the shifts between italics and upright: there are also changes in register and style.

David Seed writes that *Gravity's Rainbow* contains "discontinuities and startling shifts in register".[53] There are changes in diction, tone, and perspective. Some of it is low comedy intermixed with high culture, and some of it is colloquial language, such as most of Slothrop's dialogue. 'Says' is often spelled as 'sez', mostly without an apparent reason. The use of slang and jargon is mixed with the use of high-register vocabulary, as well as with technical and military terminology. Frequent use of untranslated sentences and snippets in foreign languages can confuse those who are not familiar with German, Latin, Italian, Spanish, or the Herero language. This, as well as puns, whimsical transitions, and other forms of humor, such as the funny names of some of the characters (Pudding, for example) are, as Molly Hite puts it, "all factors that warp the narrative away from linearity, keep it from proceeding straightforwardly toward its presumed goal".[54] A lot of it serves to make the novel more humorous; it is ripe with parody, mockery, irony, trapping the readers and characters alike in the grand joke, the insane but strangely organized chaos of the literary labyrinth. The novel uses dramatic irony to point a critical finger at the absurdities of war, the danger of overreaching state mechanisms and shallow corporate greed. However, while irony can expose problems in society, it does little to remedy the situation or present a viable alternative. As David Foster Wallace writes in "E Unibus Pluram", "[t]he reason why our pervasive cultural irony is at once so powerful and so unsatisfying is that an ironist is *impossible to pin down*".[55] An ironist's criticism, because it fails to engage with the content seriously, threatens to come up short – in the worst case scenario it becomes folded into the batter of the mainstream, losing critical power by becoming assimilated into the whole.

Gravity's Rainbow also contains numerous references to labyrinths and mazes. Mazes in the novel can be metaphorical, such as the "lush maze of initials",[56] referring to the plethora of acronyms for various departments and offices in the war, both American and British, which the Old Brigadier Pudding has difficulty navigating. This is a humorous

[52] Moore, 54.
[53] Seed, 157.
[54] Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 45.
[55] David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction". *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 summer 1993: 183. Italics original.
[56] Pynchon, 90.

passage, and Linda A. Westervelt points out that this, as well as “many of the [other] jokes are at the reader's rather than at the characters' expense”.[57] The reader is as lost in the labyrinth of initials as poor Pudding. In this section of the narrative as well as later in the story, Pudding finds himself in another maze, the building of the White Visitation, where he “must negotiate half a dozen offices or anterooms before reaching his destination … Each room will hold a single unpleasantness for him: a test he must pass”.[58] The White Visitation, a former mental hospital, is described as a labyrinthine building: “[its] rooms are triangular, spherical, walled up into mazes”.[59] Labyrinthine buildings crop up across the storyline(s), for example the Argentine exile Squalidozzi “entered a brick labyrinth that had been a harmonica factory”.[60] The megalomaniac Springer tells him: “I take down your fences and your labyrinth walls, I can lead you back to the Garden you hardly remember. ...".[61] In this section, another side character is mentioned, Graciela Imago Portales. The novel claims that “Borges is said to have dedicated a poem to her ("El laberinto de tu incertidumbre/ Me trama con la disquietante luna . . .")”.[62] In a footnote of his book on Borges, Hernan Diaz claims that this reference is “the most Borgesian homage possible […] The tone and the words chosen (every single noun, in fact—and the verb “tramar”) are all Borgesian clichés”.[63] Moore, comparing Pynchon and Borges’s tendency to create labyrinths, writes that “[o]f all living writers, perhaps nearest to Pynchon imaginatively is Jorge Luis Borges”.[64]

But Borges is not the only external labyrinthine reference; there are also mentions of the Cretan myth. Pointsman, despairing about *The Book* – Pavlov’s first forty-one lectures – embarks on “a journey more and more deviant, deliciously on, into a labyrinth of conditioned-reflex work”.[65] He invokes Venus and Ariadne, presumably to be shown the way, but also because the fantasy in which he indulges is to him deeply sexual. He mentions reencountering old paths and doubling back, which are all characteristics of labyrinthine mind processes. Pointsman also fantasizes about having “a go at the Minotaur”,[66] represented by Slothrop, whom he wishes to entrap, like some mad-scientist version of Daedalus using Pavlovian means. McHugh writes that “Pointsman exemplifies the approach to social control

---

[57] Westervelt: 73.
[58] Pynchon, 275.
[59] Pynchon, 97.
[60] Pynchon, 457.
[61] Pynchon, 461.
[62] Pynchon, 455.
[63] Diaz, 163-164.
[64] Moore, 21.
[65] Pynchon, 103.
[66] Pynchon, 170.

prevalent in capitalist democracies",[67] as his quest to control Slothrop represents the attempt to control human nature. Pointsman, who is a part of the British forces, thus represents attempts to manipulate individuals not across the enemy lines, but at home. Furthermore, Pavlovian conditioning, originally observed in animals, is here used to manipulate people – in the analogy those in control of political power see themselves as having the right to treat people as animals. The reference to the Cretan myth in combination with laboratory mazes takes matters further; those in political power have the right to create monsters, and then trap them in mazes so they can be studied and controlled.

Pavlov's *Book* reappears later on alongside Pointsman, along with another occurrence of him imagining fighting the Minotaur, but this time with the "labyrinth collapsing in rings outward, hero and horror, engineer and Ariadne consumed, molten inside the light of himself, the mad exploding of himself. . . ."[68] Obviously, Pointsman's attempt has gone awry – as Hite writes, "Pointsman's project of enclosing Slothrop into a [labyrinth] seems doomed".[69] The various uses of the labyrinth metaphor become themselves mazy – there is the labyrinthine mental process, the labyrinth as manipulation of others, and the nightmare in which Pointsman finds himself. One might argue that this entire passage leads to Pointsman falling into his own trap, getting caught up in the maze of the mind which was at least partially created by his own paranoia. He becomes "a sort of schlemihl-hero Theseus penetrating causality's labyrinth … with no Ariadne or thread to lead him back out".[70] This is analogous to the entire novel, which constructs a labyrinth of plots, but is unable to find its way out of the entanglement. Slothrop's own disintegration as person and character contributes to Pointsman's failure, as if by "diversifying his own personality [Slothrop] is no longer available for study".[71] The test subject escapes Pointsman's maze, but cannot escape the larger labyrinth that is the narrative itself. As Slothrop attempts to elude the grasp of those who would wish to control him, he finds that by leaving one trap he is only falling into another. Through the process of personal entropy, Slothrop loses his humanity, turns into a pig, and becomes a porcine version of the Minotaur, albeit one who rather than being killed gets utterly lost.

The labyrinthine building of the White Visitation contains another type of maze: that used to study mice in the laboratory. The link here to scientific testing and puzzle mazes is

[67] McHugh, 4.
[68] Pynchon, 168-169.
[69] Hite, 116-117.
[70] Moore, 78.
[71] Hite, 118.

obvious: Webley Silvernail in his hallucination makes the connection that "this lab here is also a maze, i'n't it now".[72] The passage is followed by a song entitled "Pavlovia (Beguine)", and mice sing of being lost in a maze. The anthropomorphic creatures blur the line between the human and the animal, reducing everyone to test subjects: insignificant and controllable. This idea runs through the entire novel and is the cause of much paranoia: the elusive *they* serve as architects of a massive maze that encompasses the entire narrative. They are the looming political power that takes little care for the needs of society at large or the individuals who are a part of it. The control is at least partially exerted through technology – the threat of the technologically advanced rocket invokes the paranoia of the Cold War that followed WWII. As McHugh writes, "*Gravity's Rainbow* presents the nightmare of a hyper-technological society made possible by a discourse concerned only with calculation and control".[73] Social structures that made the war possible and that allow for political power that do not work to the benefit of the many, but of those few in power, are criticized throughout the novel. However, resistance to these structures entraps those who would wish to oppose them into a maze that ultimately prevents the resistance from succeeding, and the structure of the novel mimics the dizzying effect. The political structures are enormous and the extent of their control is difficult to grasp: which is a partial reason behind the paranoia. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* Frederic Jameson writes of cyberpunk novels and computer systems, but the same can be observed in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which paranoia is "narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind".[74] Consequently, while *Gravity's Rainbow* is successful in pointing out destructive socioeconomic structures and controlling political authority, it is unclear if any opposition is possible – the metaphor of a labyrinth *in malo* rather indicates that the social and political system in which we reside is inescapable, and that those who try are doomed to perdition.

However, not all references to labyrinths and mazes in the novel are sinister: Katje's closet is described as a maze,[75] the manuals Slothrop reads contain a "maze of fuel",[76] and the town in which Geli lives is described as having a "maze of walls".[77] This juxtaposes the more

[72] Pynchon, 273.
[73] McHugh, 5.
[74] Jameson, 38.
[75] Pynchon, 232.
[76] Pynchon, 251.
[77] Pynchon, 346.

benign version of a maze with the dark and dangerous image of a place where one might get lost and die. The novel is also funny, but the dark humor that permeates it only adds to the ominousness of the labyrinthine form, which at once functions as entertainment and a tool for terror. The novel is haunted by the threat of an unseen, looming apocalyptic power that could destroy all, but the instances when danger actually occurs are often accompanied by a comic twist: as Seed points out, the episode on the beach where Katje is saved from an octopus and the episode in the very beginning where Prentice encounters the adenoid "retain the idea of power but divert it into comedy partly because the threatening force can be clearly seen – it is the *un*seen which regularly causes terror in *Gravity's Rainbow*".[78] The combination of these various aspects, all so different from each other, is what makes this literary labyrinth both terrible and terrific.

A labyrinth is a strange place, one that can interlace horror and excitement with tediousness. Seemingly endless wanderings can cause one not only to feel frustrated, but also to become disinterested. My searches through various blogs and forums online have uncovered many posts of readers for whom *Gravity's Rainbow* was simply not engrossing enough to keep reading. Its length and complexity caused other readers to spend months away from the novel, only to return periodically to read another hundred or so pages, slowly making their way through the seemingly disorganized chaos. Both Matthews and Reed Doob note that making one's way through a maze can be tedious,[79] which also applies to literary labyrinths. Locke notes that "[t]he risk that Pynchon's fiction runs is boredom, repetition without significant development, elaboration that is no more than compulsiveness," and that reading *Gravity's Rainbow* "is often profoundly exasperating".[80] As we will see in the subsequent chapters, such monotony appears in other postmodern literary labyrinths; in fact, it seems almost necessary for the book to be truly labyrinthine. But the reader is not the only one that can experience frustration at a lack of development or events. For example, the novel starts with soldiers waiting around in a house while Pirate spends his time cooking bananas. The section is funny, but also shows that war is not all action – there is also waiting and fatigue. A section further on with Roger and Jessica driving somehow turns into another long passage about life in the White Visitation, that labyrinthine building, where the narrative voice changes to *you,* pulling the reader into the coiling plot:

[78] Seed, 198. Italics original.
[79] Matthews, 242; Reed Doob, 174.
[80] Locke <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>.

> The tired men and their black bellwether reaching as far as they can, as far from their sheeps' clothing as the year will let them stray. Come then. Leave your war awhile, paper or iron war, petrol or flesh, come in with your love, your fear of losing, your exhaustion with it.[81]

War has often been described as months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror, with a constant threat of death. A labyrinth *in malo*, which is a place where people can get lost and die, is a smaller and more contained space than a warzone, but it nevertheless represents a situation that breeds terror and paranoia as much as it can breed boredom.

In an early review of the novel, Jonathan Rosenbaum notes that "the horror of Pynchon's vision is not merely that we're all victims of obsessive plots, but that we're all obsessive builders of them":[82] the paranoia extends to the reader. Notions of the apocalyptic and the dystopian are becoming more and more popular: postmodernism seems to be prone to embracing the dark, the dangerous, and the paranoid. The uncertain lines between the fictional and the real and our questioning of reality itself are reflected in the novel, drawing us further into the labyrinthine mess. Even though as readers we also experience a view from above, in this particular book we cannot decipher its totality as an onlooker from above could understand the structure of a hedge maze. The labyrinth of *Gravity's Rainbow* is more reminiscent of the extraordinarily complex and partially underground or covered ancient labyrinths of Egypt and Crete. But we are still offered a birds-eye view when it comes to the aerial threat of the rocket falling on a city. Kathryn Hume points out the labyrinthine nature of the real, imaginary, or even hallucinated cities in *Gravity's Rainbow,* the "labyrinthine cityscapes".[83] The people in the cities are likened to ants or rats in a maze, which emphasizes their insignificance and vulnerability along with the threat of the imminent death-by-rocket breeding paranoia. However, the readers are allowed a perspective in which they "ultimately experience the viewpoints of rocket and victim through dual or simultaneous vision".[84] In *Gravity's Rainbow,* we can relate to the rat, since we have been pulled into the labyrinth through the reading process, but also the rocket that threatens to destroy human life. This image of duality is much darker than the usual role of the maze wanderer who, by walking

[81] Pynchon, 159.
[82] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "One man's meat is another man's Poisson," blog post, copy of review for *The Village Voice*, 1973, 7 Feb, 2019, 22 July 2019 <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2019/02/one-mans-meat-is-another-mans-poisson/>.
[83] Hume, 625, 632.
[84] Kathryn Hume, "Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity's Rainbow*". *American Literature* 60.4 Dec. 1988: 625.

the paths, gains understanding of the structure as a whole. Reed Doob also writes that mazes imply “dual or multiple perspectives”,[85] seen as they can be from within, or from above once we have solved the puzzle. However, *Gravity's Rainbow*, while providing a dual perspective, never offers itself to total resolution. Throughout the novel, the image of the rocket serves as the ever-present subtext, a red threat – at once the Minotaur and the clew, causing paranoia, as well serving as a reminder of the ever-present *they,* the architects of the maze who wish to manipulate those who walk it.

Molly Hite writes that both “*V.* and *Lot 49* offer something that looks like a conventional narrative as a guiding thread through their labyrinths of thematic complication”, while *Gravity's Rainbow* “[thwarts] expectations of conventional narrative continuity”.[86] This shows that the novel is a failed labyrinth, which crumbles as the structure disintegrates towards the end. However, the narrative still branches, the characters are on a quest for the (non-existent) center, and danger looms over the entire story. *Gravity's Rainbow* as a postmodernist labyrinth, albeit one whose structure does not perfectly hold, performs the function of disorienting and confusing characters and readers alike. The resistance to “The Man” and the social criticism it offers are analogous to a wanderer futilely trying to solve an impossible and manipulative maze. The labyrinthine nature is further exemplified by the dead ends represented by the side stories. The plot, placing characters at crossroads, continually forces them to make choices – some of which result in a continuation of the narrative, some of which trail off into the labyrinth. Hite is correct to write that the “knots in the plot refuse to unravel”,[87] but that does not disqualify *Gravity's Rainbow* as a labyrinth (and indeed that is not the argument Hite is making – on the same page, she calls the plot labyrinthine): it simply points to the novel as a labyrinth *in malo*, which is as ruthless to the reader as it is to the characters.

In the final parts of the book the labyrinth gets out of control; the narrative paths are hard or impossible to follow, and “the structure is strained beyond the breaking point”.[88] It is a labyrinth that is falling apart, taking its characters with it. The love affair between Jessica and Roger comes to an end. Slothrop gets lost, disappears in the plethora of paths, never to be seen again. Poor Gottfried, strapped inside the rocket, is accelerating towards inevitable doom. The crumbling literary labyrinth of *Gravity's Rainbow* ends with death; it is an ending

---

[85] Reed Doob, 188.
[86] Hite, 96.
[87] Hite, 97.
[88] Locke <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>.

no critic can ignore. As Locke puts it, the rocket “falls on the reader in the last words of the last page”.[89] Rosenbaum implies that for readers, our participation in the entire novel culminates in “our own annihilation”, which, to complicate matters, is something we enjoy.[90] On the final page, just before we break into a jolly song, the rocket is “a bright angel of death”, and the torn last sentence, “[n]ow everybody—“[91] implies death for all, the story, the characters, even our role as readers. It is the ultimate destruction of the entire labyrinth, a collapse of narrative as well as structure, an inevitable ending followed by a blank page. The rocket is aimed at “us”, collectively: as Hite writes, “the narrator shifts to direct address”,[92] turns to the readers and calls us by the second person pronoun *you*. And while Mendelson writes, “all that has been concluded is our reading of a book”,[93] the novel’s message of resistance, however pointless it often seems, might stay with the reader. Because while *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not optimistic in its labyrinthine portrayal of attempts to change the unfavorable cultural and social environment in the novel itself, its very existence is still an attempt to change the cultural and social reality of those who read it. The labyrinth should be understood as a warning to be careful, not to shy away.

[89] Locke <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>.
[90] Rosenbaum <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2019/02/one-mans-meat-is-another-mans-poisson/>.
[91] Pynchon, 902.
[92] Hite, 106.
[93] Edward Mendelson, “Edward Mendelson on Enyclopedic Nature”, *Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003) 105.

Chapter III: The Halfway House of Asterion

Due to its sheer length and complexity, it is difficult to place *Infinite Jest* within a genre. Like *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is commonly described as encyclopedic, and indeed David Foster Wallace stated in an interview that he "wanted there to be this enormous amount of information".[94] However, this definition is not comprehensive: as this chapter will reveal, *Infinite Jest* is a postmodern labyrinthine work, a designation which can combine not only the vast amounts of data, but also the non-linearity of the narrative, the multiple narrative lines, its disturbing and comedic effect, its irony along with the shifts in register, labyrinthine language, and much more. As Emma-Lee Moss wrote for *The Guardian*, *Infinite Jest* is a "monumental maze of a story".[95] The structure, which may seem disordered, seems to have been created as organized chaos; in an interview for *The Boston Phoenix*, Wallace said that the book "may be a mess, but it's a very careful mess".[96] On one hand, the style and structure of *Infinite Jest* parodies academia in the postmodern manner of ironic self-awareness – on the other hand, it has an uncanny way of tapping into the deepest human emotions: in an interview, Wallace speaks about how sad the novel is, how it "manifests itself as a kind of lostness", and how it "doesn't move the way normal books do".[97] In this chapter, I will explore how the novel uses the circular labyrinthine metaphor to tackle the problem of addiction – either to drugs or to entertainment media. I will show how this creates a mental maze for the sufferer, but one which might be inescapable. *Infinite Jest* uses parody to present the individualistic and self-observed ONANite society, but shies away from direct criticism, and takes a nihilistic attitude. The characters are unable to form communities and are subsequently lost in a labyrinthine isolation. One of the most prominent labyrinthine characteristics of the novel is its endnotes, which create choices for the reader – as I will demonstrate, they invite the reader to take on a more participatory role, and create narrative options. The combination of all these factors point to *Infinite Jest* as a unique textual maze, but one whose message is in line with the darker labyrinths of postmodernism.

---

[94] Valerie Stivers, "The Jester Holds Court", *Stim*, 1996, 22 Aug 2019, <http://www.stim.com/Stim-x/0596May/Verbal/dfwtalk.html>.
[95] Emma-Lee Moss, "Infinite Jest at 20: still a challenge, still brilliant." *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2016, 8 Aug. 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/feb/15/infinite-jest-at-20-still-a-challenge-still-brilliant-emma-lee-moss>.
[96] Anne Marie Donahue, "David Foster Wallace winces at the suggestion that his book is sloppy in any sense", an interview with David Foster Wallace, *The Boston Phoenix,* 21 – 28 Mar, 1996. 22 Aug. 2019 <http://www.smallbytes.net/~bobkat/boston2.html>.
[97] Laura Miller, "David Foster Wallace", an interview with David Foster Wallace, *Salon*, 9 Mar 1996, 22 Aug 2019 <https://www.salon.com/test/1996/03/09/wallace_5/>.

At 1079 pages, *Infinite Jest* is the longest of the books discussed in this thesis. Its labyrinthine structure is not immediately obvious, nor does it concern itself with labyrinths as a main theme. However, it does contain labyrinthine images and labyrinthine metaphors, especially in its descriptions of addiction and recovery. At its core, there is also entertainment, both in the sense that it is entertaining, and that it concerns itself with entertainment as a phenomenon of contemporary times. It uses parody to criticize our obsession with entertainment and satirizes our individualistic society. Frank Cioffi calls its narrative a "performance",[98] but also argues that the reading process requires a type of performance from the reader, stating that "reading this novel is a near-aerobic activity".[99] This is mainly in relation to the notes and errata, which "take up almost 100 fine-print pages at the end of the work – about twelve percent of the text".[100] I argue that the actions required from the reader also create choices. The first obvious physical action is the flipping back and forth to the endnotes, but Cioffi also writes that often, the reader needs to flip back and forth through the book. This is because some connected parts of the story are separated by several hundred pages, and the reader might need to go back to verify what the previous events were. It is a choice the reader can make: go back and check what happened, or continue on the narrative path. Obviously, this depends on the reader's capacity for memory and willingness to return to search for a previous section.

The endnotes are somewhat different; the reader can never know if the endnote will be a one-line comment or explanation, an extensive list, a series of letters, or a multi-page elaboration of the story. In a letter to his editor, Wallace stated that one reason for including the endnotes was to "allow/make the reader go literally physically 'back and forth' in a way that perhaps cutely mimics some of the story's thematic concerns",[101] such as the experience of addiction or mental illness. Some of the endnotes are entirely separate chapters inserted into the back of the book, sometimes for no apparent reason. There is no obvious need for the chapters that constitute endnotes 324 and 332 not to be included in the main text; they seem to be there purely to convolute the reading process. At each endnote encountered in the main text, the reader therefore has a choice; check what the endnote is, or skip it. Among readers who pick up the novel for pleasure skipping is common, because the narrative has a tendency

---

[98] Frank Louis Cioffi, "An Anguish Become Thing: Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest"", *Narrative* 8.2 May 2000: 161-181.
[99] Cioffi, 168.
[100] Cioffi, 165.
[101] D. T. Max, "The Unfinished". *The New Yorker*. 28 Feb. 2009. 26 Nov. 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/09/the-unfinished>.

to tire the casual and close reader alike. Flipping back and forth to and from the endnotes can become a tedious task, especially when many of them are clustered on a single page, and when many of them are short, one-sentence explanations of the names of various drugs or the numerous acronyms that appear throughout the text.

One of the functions of the endnotes is to add information, which is another reason why *Infinite Jest* is often called an encyclopedic novel. However, as David Letzer puts it, "*Infinite Jest*'s notes are not always used for this straightforwardly encyclopedic purpose";[102] rather they serve to complicate the narrative and create a sense of irony. The joke is also on the academic style of writing, which is not confined to the endnotes alone: throughout the novel, academia is both mocked and revered, in a somewhat self-conscious awareness of tension between the usefulness and frequent overdramatization of academic prose. Irony is further reflected in the two types of *Infinite Jest's* endnotes, the explanatory and parodic ones. Letzer writes that "two types of notes theoretically ought to negate each other's effect entirely".[103] The fact that they do not is because *Infinite Jest* is a novel, not an encyclopedia: while it is in many ways representative of the material world, it is a play on reality, not reality itself. Works of literature have the unique privilege of not having to stick to hard facts, which often allows them to be able to portray the external world in a new and original way – using fiction to shed light on the reality of our everyday lives. While some of the endnotes might simply have been inserted for kicks-and-giggles, the sheer mass of them has an additional function, as will be discussed below, to represent our experience with the amount of data we encounter in the material reality we inhibit – which can also seem like a navigating a maze. And as far as the labyrinthine structure of the novel is concerned, the endnotes complicate the narrative, create dead ends, and sometimes lead the reader down a completely new path, itself forking.

This is done in several ways. When it comes to the longer passages included in the endnotes, for example endnote 324 which spans seven pages of fine print, this means that the reader is sent on a side-path that can take them further away from the main narrative. Furthermore, endnotes themselves often have endnotes, or refer the reader to a completely different endnote. For example, endnote (e) of endnote 324 sends the reader back to note 22, which is one of the simple explanatory one-line notes that seem of little importance to the narrative itself. Two of the endnotes (87, 154) send the reader to note 24, which is a nine

[102] David Letzler, "Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft of Fiction: "Infinite Jest"'s Endnotes", *Studies in the Novel* 44.3, fall 2012: 305.
[103] Letzler, 305.

page list of James Incandenza's filmography, and features footnotes a-f. Such inter-connectedness of the endnotes is frequent, but sometimes strange: for example, endnotes 39, 45, 173, 302, and 314 all refer the reader to endnote 304. While note 304 is important to the narrative, it is not likely that the reader will read through it a total of six times – and while continually reminding the reader of the story it contains fortifies its meaning, the number of repetitions is excessive. The resulting effect is that of convolution for the sake of convolution.

Endnote 304 is a part of the narrative line of Rémy Marathe, and it explains the reasons for his disability and the dangerous game, *Le Jeu du Prochain Train*, which he and his peers played and which is a tradition in the socially and economically disadvantaged environment where he grew up. It is unclear why four preceding endnotes refer to a later endnote; Letzler ponders this very thing, asking "[w]hen does a reader move ahead to read this important note? Should one do it immediately from note 39? If so, one risks losing concentration on not only that earlier note but on the crucial passage to which that endnote is keyed in the first place".[104] Readers are therefore forced to perform data triage, and decide on the reading order during the reading process itself. Following the forking line requires quite an effort on the part of the reader, especially because the explanation is included as part of an essay written by a side character, James Albrecht Lockley Struck Jr. This is further complicated by the fact that Struck is a part of the Hal Incandenza's storyline, not Marathe's. In the endnote, Struck is busy plagiarizing an essay as part of a post-Midterm paper in a course on Canadian history. The author of the original essay is not disclosed explicitly, but his surname is mentioned in endnote (e) to the endnote: it is most likely Geoffrey Day, one of the residents in Ennet House, who is a part of the Gately storyline. In endnote 304, the three main narrative paths of *Infinite Jest* – that of Hal Incandenza, that of Rémy Marathe, and that of Don Gately all intersect, constituting one of the connections between the related but separate stories. Like several other endnotes, note 304 includes footnotes, this time numbered, which start with number 4. This is presumably because that is how they are listed in the essay Struck is plagiarizing; and footnotes 4 and 5 indeed are citations of works, for a cartridge and book respectively. However, footnote 6 is not an academic-style footnote, and it is unclear why it is not included in the endnotes to the endnote. The effect is further convolution and perplexity. Furthermore, because of the abundance of information that this particular endnote contains, not all is always revealed on the first read – sometimes, the reader will only discover new information once they have gone through the same note for the

[104] Letzler, 317.

second or even third time, which presents itself as another fork in the path that they have previously missed.

Sometimes, the information included in the endnotes is also repetitive; for example, note 255 explains that the word 'Item' is "NNE street argot for any kind of handgun",[105] even though this is already mentioned in the text on page 531. It is not the only example of a repetition of an explanation; Gately's childhood nickname, BIM, is also explained twice.[106] In a book that does not usually coddle its readers this is unusual, and results in a double-back rather than a move forward, which is a labyrinthine feature. Note 255 is one of three endnotes included on page 608, all three of which seem to serve little purpose other than to make the reader do the work of flipping to the end of the novel and back. The events that transpire on page 608 are exciting and action-packed, as they describe the account leading up to Gately being shot. Wallace's inclusion of inane notes explaining the origin of Gately's clothing or a definition of a previously-explained term interferes with the linearity of the reading process. It is almost challenging the reader to not stop mid-sentence and to not bother with the endnote, especially if they are fully-engaged in the events unraveling in the story. It can cause annoyance when the reader flips back and the footnote (256) only states that a character still has their hands up and is holding keys.

Throughout the entire novel, it is up to the reader to make the choice between skipping endnotes or full passages, skimming, or reading attentively, as well as to decide on the order in which they will read some of the endnotes that are referred to multiple times. In skipping some of the parts that are less obviously relevant, the reader risks missing something that could be crucial to the story. On the other hand, the reader soon learns that some passages simply do not propel the narrative, but rather constitute long winding explanations, for example of the intricacies of tennis or math. This is comparable to a wanderer in a labyrinth, who, suspecting that a side-path might result in a dead end, takes it anyway and experiences frustration when they are correct. On the other hand, they might also take a peek and then ignore a side path that they decide leads nowhere, which is similar to quickly glancing and then ignoring a short endnote, which the reader judges to not be important enough to read. In this way, each time a superscript number appears in the text, the reader necessarily makes a choice – even if that choice is always the same. Labyrinths tend to entice wanderers, who want to understand them fully – and total comprehension of the structure can

[105] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 1045.
[106] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 448 and 902.

only be attained by not only making every choice, but also taking every path. In his essay on Borges, John Barth writes that "[a] labyrinth, after all, is a place in which, ideally, all the possibilities of choice (of direction, in this case) are embodied, and […] must be exhausted before one reaches the heart".[107] For Barth, the heart is not merely reaching the center of the labyrinth or the end of a novel, but also obtaining a full understanding of the structure and the meaning it hides. Not all readers strive for this – indeed the novel can be finished by not taking every path – however, the effect the labyrinthine structure has on many readers is to make them want to know it all, which might explain why *Infinite Jest* has inspired such a strong and devoted following.

Letzler compares sifting through the abundance of often irrelevant information contained in *Infinite Jest* to living in the modern age.[108] Even though the novel was written in the nineties, its maze of plentiful choices and the profuseness of information it contains parodies and predicts the current overwhelming amount of data with which everyone deals on a daily basis. In fact, according to Wallace, one of the reasons for including the endnotes was also to "mimic the information-flood and data-triage I expect'd be an even bigger part of US life 15 years hence".[109] Therefore, the labyrinthine structure that the endnotes help strengthen is also used to showcase a very real feature of our time – the choices we need to make in sorting through the overabundance of data, the effect the data can have on a person, and the way we cannot help but keep engaging with it. One way we consume information today is essentially by consuming snippets – checking social media posts, constantly seeing ads, and receiving notifications on our phones all amount to enormous quantities but very little in-depth content – much like (some of) the endnotes. In an article for *Forbes,* Bernard Marr writes how "[o]ur brains are being expected to cope with data flowing into them from all directions",[110] which may lead to an overload. Often, we do not attempt to stem the flow of information; according to Marr, this is because information can also be addictive. This is certainly true in the way some readers become obsessed with novels such as *Infinite Jest.* Furthermore, sifting through the amount of information is also often dull, or dulling. Letzler wonders if perhaps a way to deal with reading this sort of texts is to "achieve a quasi-

---

[107] John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion", *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984): 75.
[108] Letzler, 311.
[109] Max, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/09/the-unfinished>.
[110] Bernard Marr, "Why Too Much Data Is Stressing Us Out", *Forbes*, 25 Nov. 2015, 31 Aug. 2019 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2015/11/25/why-too-much-data-is-stressing-us-out/#53b37f5cf763>.

monastic state".[111] In relation to labyrinths, this invokes medieval unicursal mazes, which served to put the wanderer in just such a meditative state of mind. However, it is unclear if this is possible for a reader to maintain when reading *Infinite Jest*: more likely they would fluctuate between deep interest, excitement, frustration, boredom, and the odd monastic experience, especially if one is to make it through absolutely every endnote, list, or long winding passage.

Another way in which *Infinite Jest* engages with consumption of information and addiction with content is through television – ONANites, like Americans, spend large amounts of time watching screens. The largest threat posed in the novel is through a potentially deadly cartridge recording called the "Entertainment". Viewing it is so pleasurable that the victim refuses to get up from their chair, watching it over and over until they die or go insane. The only way to rescue someone who has been caught in the trap is to cut power to the building; anyone else who enters the room to pull the viewer out will also be unable to leave. The film is used by various factions in the novel as a weapon and its existence is a close-guarded secret; authorities in O.N.A.N. fear that people might want to watch it, unable to resist the idea of death by pleasure. According to Marathe, this ability to choose death might just be an unstoppable threat to the entire society; that is why the film is so feared and why the authorities are trying to stop its dissemination.[112] The film is symbolic of the worst case scenario of television addiction, an ironic finger pointing to millions sitting in their recliners refusing to get up even to go to the toilet – and while this may seem extreme, today there exist actual accounts of people's health seriously affected by their inability to leave the screen. Tabloids all over the world report on teenagers who die after playing too much video games[113] and numerous studies have been done on the link between excessive television watching and poor physical health.[114] Suddenly, Wallace looks even more like a prophet and the Entertainment even less like fiction.

---

[111] Letzler, 311.
[112] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 319.
[113] C.f. Ryan Fahey, "Video game addict, 17, is found slumped dead on his computer after suffering a stroke as he played at night in Thailand Video game addict, 17, is found slumped dead on his computer after suffering a stroke as he played at night in Thailand", *Daily Mail Online*, 5 Nov. 2019, 27 Nov. 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7650671/Video-game-addict-17-slumped-dead-computer-Thailand.html> or Kristie McCrum, "Tragic teen gamer dies after 'playing computer for 22 days in a row'", *Mirror*, 3 Sep. 2015, 27 Nov. 2019 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/tragic-teen-gamer-dies-after-6373887>.
[114] "Television Watching and "Sit Time"", *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health*, 27 Nov. 2019 <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-causes/television-and-sedentary-behavior-and-obesity/#References>.

In “E Unibus Pluram”, David Foster Wallace points out that watching television is usually something one does alone: “TV itself, and especially its advertising, has from the outset projected itself at the lone viewer, Joe Briefcase, alone”.[115] Joe Briefcase is what he calls the typical viewer immersing themselves in the television programs, falling into an addictive pattern much like the rest of America. Wallace also points out that while television advertisements used to promote “inclusion in some attractive community”,[116] these days, they promote individualism: being different is cool; being a part of a group is *passé*. In *Infinite Jest*, too, there is no sense of communal warmth, not even within family units or sports teams. The desire to belong is simply not on the radar, while the sense of not belonging is strong. One could describe Hal, for example, as not being able to form genuine human relationships even with those closest to him (except with his mentally and physically disabled brother), but he never looks to a lack of community or sense of co-humanness with others as a reason for his isolation – because in his society, individualism has deep roots.

One of the potential symptoms of a lack of connection with others and a feeling of deep isolation is addiction, another is depression. The characters in *Infinite Jest* who are struggling with mental health issues all have trouble forming interpersonal relationships (Kate Gompert perhaps most of all) and do not find fulfillment in the presence of others. Fear of real human connection in the novel is almost universal, and representative of how Wallace sees contemporary society: a lot of people are lonely, and “[l]onely people tend rather to be lonely because they decline to bear the emotional costs associated with being around other humans”.[117] While *Infinite Jest* criticizes the society that produces isolated individuals, it also offers little in terms of an alternative – characters seem as if stuck in a maze, unable to find their way out. Labyrinths, after all, are structures for individuals – there is no myth of a group of friends solving a maze (Theseus entered alone). Reading is not much different: if we zoom out, there is the reader, weaving their way through the labyrinthine structure of the novel, also alone.

The structure of *Infinite Jest* as a novel is such that the characters’ backgrounds are discovered in various parts of the narrative, or contained in the endnotes, breaking up their various storylines from the past and to the present. The events are not placed chronologically and are often intermixed. Parts of the story intersect and go back to the original line, such as the long description of Mario’s puppet film played at the Interdependence Day gala dinner.

[115] Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram”, 175.
[116] Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram”, 175.
[117] Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram”, 152.

The part of the novel that includes the movie, which is described in its entirety, complete with dialogue that looks as if it were taken from a script, side-tracks frequently to explain the tragic story of Eric Clipperton. The narrative line winds back and forth, and the Clipperton story seems like a dead end until Clipperton's own end is explained, and Mario's sad role in the aftermath as the person who cleaned up the brain-matter. Clipperton's way of winning tennis matches by threatening to commit suicide should he lose is not only improbable, it's absurd. However, the dark humor makes his story no less disturbing, nor is its completion any less sad. This way of interlacing the glum with the funny and the sincerely piteous has an emotional effect on the reader. It is partially why those who make it to the end of the labyrinth are both, in the words of Emma-Lee Moss, "irreparably damaged"[118] and often somewhat obsessed. Cioffi goes as far as to call the readers addicted, writing that the "novel almost ensorcells readers, entangling them in a web".[119] One might also choose to say *entrapping them in a labyrinth*.

As far as labyrinthine language is concerned, *Infinite Jest* frequently switches between various registers. For example, the E.T.A. prorector deLint often uses poor grammar, and none of the inhabitants of Ennet House seem to have a very good grasp of the English language. Sometimes, the endnotes provide smug commentary on the simpler language used by some of the characters: for example, in a paragraph about Gately, endnote 140 explains the term used in the text is not what Gately would use, but would rather use a "vulgar signifier",[120] and the next endnote explains that instead of saying 'black', Gately would use a racially insensitive term. The endnote which follows concerns an AA speaker, who is not well-received by the audience, and states that she would not have used any of the more sophisticated language actually used in the text. The slang and jargon used by the AA members, the more technical terms relating to film, even the mathematical explanations contained in some of the endnotes all contribute to the novel's complexity, much like they do in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The endnotes, however, often explain the terms or point out mistakes, which if anything, further complicates the use of different types of registers; through those, the narrator can either distance themselves from some of the language used in the text itself, or create further connections between the characters' way of expressing themselves and the narrator's own linguistic style. Another similarity to *Gravity's Rainbow,* and indeed

[118] Moss <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/feb/15/infinite-jest-at-20-still-a-challenge-still-brilliant-emma-lee-moss>.
[119] Cioffi, 178.
[120] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 1026.

something all the three main novels have in common, is the use of graphs, symbols, or various squiggles on the page. The graphs in endnote 123 and the images on page 502 both function as diversification and a distraction. The use of letters, such as those exchanged between Avril and Orin Incandenza or Helen Steeply and Marlon Bain are also ways of further complicating the labyrinth. The same goes for the inclusion of Ms. Steeply's curriculum vitae, her interviews with Orin, where her questions are never written but only designated with a Q, and the complete list of James Incandenza's filmography. The changes in font, not only between the main text and the endnotes, but within the text itself, create variations on the page, as does the inclusion of page-or-more long dialogues which at points narrow or widen the narrative "path" on the page itself. Some of the pages, especially those containing letters, are half-empty, which further contributes to making the book itself, as a physical object, resemble a labyrinthine, changing structure.

The novel also mentions labyrinths, but the metaphor is mostly used for dealing with substance abuse. The only non-addiction related mention of a maze appears as a description of the Enfield Tennis Academy; "the school's maze of tennis courts".[121] It does not seem absolutely clear how a leveled hill-top with tennis courts could be described as a maze, considering that the tennis courts would all be the same size and the lines between them clear. However, it might simply mean that, since there are so many tennis courts, and they all look alike, finding one's way around them can be disorienting. More significantly, the Academy is labyrinthine because its grounds are laced with tunnels. The description of the underground parts of the school invokes the idea of the labyrinth: as the novel states "[t]he E.T.A. is abundantly, embranchingly tunnelled".[122] The tunnels are never explicitly referred to as a maze, but the tunnels are intricate, sometimes forking, and some of them are dark and unpleasant. They also have dead ends and hold secrets. In the novel, they are described in the following way:

> There are access tunnels and hallway tunnels, with rooms and labs and Pump Room's Lung-nexus off both sides, utility tunnels and storage tunnels and little blunt off-tunnels connecting tunnels to other tunnels. Maybe about sixteen different tunnels in all, in a shape that's more generally ovoid than anything else.[123]

---

[121] Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 198.
[122] Wallace, *Infinite jest*, 49.
[123] Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 666.

The tunnels serve as a way for Avril Incandenza, who is extremely agoraphobic, to be able to travel from the Headmaster's House to her office. Avril's behavior is perhaps indicative of her unhappiness with the society in general, and her agoraphobia a way to distance herself from that society. Consequently, she isolates herself in the Academy and uses the labyrinthine tunnels to avoid the external world. The tunnels also have other purposes: a secondary tunnel serves as living quarters for the prorectors, and others serve as a place for former students to leave unwanted belongings. Apparently, some are unknown to the administration, and are used by older students to privately consume various substances, or by the group of young students known as the Tunnel Club, who explore the tunnels for fun. Some serve as storage for the Lung, an inflatable structure that covers some of the tennis courts in the winter. The Pump Room, which keeps the Lung inflated, is described almost as a living creature, a "kind of spider hanging upside-down".[124] While it does not seem to scare the students, it still invokes the image of a monster at the center of a labyrinth.

However, the main labyrinthine metaphor in the storyline concerns addiction. Indeed, the only time the myth of Theseus is alluded to in the novel is when it is likened to trying to find the reason behind one's addiction: "The *Why* of the Disease is a labrynth [sic] it is strongly suggested all AAs boycott, inhabited as the maze is by the twin minotaurs of *Why Me?* and *Why Not?*, a.k.a. Self-Pity and Denial, two of the smily-faced Sergeant at Arms' more fearsome aides de camp".[125] In the labyrinth of addiction houses the threat represented by the (futile) attempt to explain, or justify the circumstances leading to the addiction, which can quickly lead to mistaken perceptions with deadly consequences: addiction is a labyrinth *in malo.* The second mention appears later in the novel, when Don Gately is speaking at an AA meeting. Gately, while successfully sober, struggles with the notion of god that is central to AA, and while he tries to surrender to a higher power, he feels that it is a sham:

> Publicly, in front of a very tough and hard-ass-looking AA crowd, he sort of simultaneously confesses and complains that he feels like a rat that's learned one route in the maze to the cheese and travels that route in a ratty-type fashion and whatnot. W/ the God thing being the cheese in the metaphor.[126]

The metaphor of the labyrinth in this instance is curious; Gately has learned the way to the center, but does not benefit from solving the maze. The rules of AA, the guidelines and

[124] Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 52.
[125] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 374.
[126] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 443.

suggestions serve as the red thread that leads Gately on his path of sobriety, but fail to help him perceive the labyrinth as a whole, or to understand the overall meaning of the journey. This is in opposition to the traditional maze, where the wanderer, having found the way to the "cheese", feels a sense of accomplishment, or a traditional labyrinthine text, where the reader, coming to the end of the book, feels an understanding of the narrative as a whole. Perhaps this is because Gately does not solve the labyrinth by himself; he merely follows the path that was pointed out to him by others, and as a result, "Gately still feels like he has no access to the Big spiritual Picture".[127]

The next mention of labyrinth is in endnote 269, which is a letter from Marlon Bain to Helen Steeply. Marlon writes that Orin and he

> wandered disastrously into the sort of pseudophilosophical mental labyrinth that Bob Hope-smokers are always wandering into and getting trapped in and wasting huge amounts of time[a] inside an intellectual room they cannot negotiate their way out of …[128]

The footnote (a) describes how the traditional perception of the lack of motivation marihuana smokers experience is incorrect; instead, they get trapped in "labyrinths of reflexive abstraction",[129] trying to crawl their way out. In this instance, it is not the addiction itself that resembles a labyrinth, but the effects the substance has on the minds of those who smoke it. It is clear that those who are affected by addiction are wandering through a maze of sorts; on their path to recovery, they encounter dead ends, sometimes double back, and most importantly, are trying desperately to find their way out. Much like self-pity and denial, alcohol or narcotics also seem to be minotaurs that addicts fear and try to escape. The threat of relapse is constant, making the addict feel like they are in a dangerous labyrinth. The outside world is referred to as Out There, external to the struggle. However, mazes can be calming as well as threatening. When it comes to treating addiction to drugs, some real life drug rehabilitation centers turn to mazes; according to an article in *The Atlantic*, "mindfulness mazes in the desert"[130] are a part of the therapy offered in some facilities. So the way out of the threatening maze of addiction, a labyrinth *in malo* with many choices that might lead to

---

[127] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 443.
[128] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 1048.
[129] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 1048.
[130] Gabrielle Glaser, "The Irrationality of Alcoholics Anonymous", *The Atlantic*, April 2015, 18 Aug. 2019 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/the-irrationality-of-alcoholics-anonymous/386255/>.

relapse, might just be the labyrinth *in bono*, a unicursal meditative maze teaching patience and offering calm. However, the addicts in the novel are offered no such respite.

Using the metaphor of a labyrinth *in malo* to describe the effects of addiction or the toils encountered on the path of recovery may be apt, but it emphasizes another feature of such labyrinths – the wanderer is attempting to solve the maze by themselves, and is ultimately the only one responsible for their success or failure. Because a labyrinth is a self-contained and circular structure, the use of its image to convey the experience of being addicted takes away any responsibility on the part of the wider society in which individuals suffering from addiction are situated. In the novel, addicts can belong to any social class – from Don Gately, who was raised in a poor household with a physically abusive stepfather, to Hal Incandenza, whose prominent family is well-off and respected in society. Hal's father, also an addict, comes from a middle-class family. But the fact that addiction can affect anyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, is not treated as a subject in the novel – if anything the implication is that the disease runs in the family, since most addicts mentioned have relatives who are also suffering from substance abuse. Furthermore, because the addicts are encouraged to not look for reasons behind their addiction, but to focus on moving forward, any social factors that might have contributed to their condition are presented as unimportant.

In our society, addiction, especially among young people is now more wide-spread than ever before, and there is evidence to suggest that social and cultural factors have contributed to the rise in substance abuse in this and the previous century. An informative study by Joseph Westermeyer points to changing social structures, the lack of responsibility assigned to adolescents and their minimal involvement in social and political life, changes in child raising and family culture, as well as changing social norms regarding binge drinking and substance abuse among the many factors that contribute to the prevalence of addictive behaviors.[131] According to Westermeyer and other researchers in the subject of addiction,[132] the causes can be a combination of genetic, biological, psychological and social factors, and a comprehensive solution should tackle individual treatment as well as systematic changes in how addiction is treated by wider society, in politics, and by law enforcement. Westermeyer concludes that "[t]he failure of traditional social institutions to protect us from addiction does

[131] Joseph Westermeyer, "The role of cultural and social factors in the cause of addictive disorders", *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 22.2 June 1999: 253-73.
[132] Cf. W. R. Miller and K. M. Carroll, eds., *Rethinking Substance Abuse: What Science Shows, and What We Should Do About It* (New York: Guilford Press: 2006).

not mean that we must seek drug panaceas only in nonsocietal venues, such as medications and psychotherapies".[133] However, in *Infinite Jest*, the characters that engage in substance abuse are treated as trapped in a labyrinth, with no connection to the outside world. In this, they are hardly different from anyone else – they are like the lone viewer of television, sitting in their armchair, watching the world through a screen, but essentially detached from it. The addiction to media and addiction to drugs are the same in the way they isolate an individual and pollute their mind.

For N. Katherine Hayles, how the characters experience media and entertainment is associated with the pollution in the Great Concavity, as well as represented by the junk information contained in the endnotes. The Concavity is one of the central themes in the text, and is both ignored and feared by the inhabitants of the country, who clearly dislike the idea of an enormous toxic dump that has taken up a large chunk of previously inhabited land. Hayles writes that the novel contains endless loops and continuous circulation of waste, literal and metaphorical:

> the large project of *Infinite Jest* is to demonstrate the fallacy of the dump by exploring the underground seepages and labyrinthine pathways through which the abjected always returns in recursive cycles of interconnection that inexorably tie together the sanctified and the polluted.[134]

In the novel, the production of waste is turned into energy, and the extreme pollution of an entire part of the country creates a cycle of rapid, lush, but unnatural growth followed by destruction of this environment. There are rumors of "infants the size of prehistoric beasts roaming the overfertilized east Concavity quadrants",[135] worshipped by marihuana-smoking locals. One cannot help but make a connection to the infantilized viewer, sitting in front of their screens, consuming indiscriminately for distraction and cheap entertainment. The implication is that the minds of the ONANites might be just as polluted as the environment in which they live. Their solution to their waste, after all, is to literally destroy a vast expanse of the country, turn it into a toxic dump, use giant fans to divert the gases, and pretend it's not a problem.

The pollution is not only environmental; it seeps into how the inhabitants view reality, and how they consume entertainment. The novel concerns itself extensively with the media as

[133] Westermeyer, 270.
[134] N. Katherine Hayles, "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and "Infinite Jest"", *New Literary History* 30.3 Summer, 1999: 686.
[135] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 562.

a vice, where the consumers are offered what seem like infinite choices of channels and viewing options to peruse, and can freely decide on what to watch. However, that is not really the case: if anything, what the consumers can watch is heavily tailored, created by manipulative companies whose ultimate goal is not to entertain, but to profit. The consumer's choice is fictional and therefore meaningless – freedom is a sham: "viewers had been conditioned […] to associate the Freedom to Choose and the Right to Be Entertained with all that was U.S. and true".[136] The cartridges that were introduced later are not much different, and regardless of the claims that "a viewer could more or less *100% choose what's on at any given time*",[137] the choice again came from a pre-determined set of options. In a conversation with Steeply, Marathe likens this to a father who "cries out "Freedom!" and allows his child to choose only what is sweet, eating only candy, not pea soup and bread and eggs, so his child becomes weak and sick".[138] Steeply tries to counter this assertion by claiming that the U.S. citizens are not children, but the novel implies exactly that; viewers *want* to be children: after all, the most entrancing cartridge is the Entertainment, a film where the camera is placed into a crib or basinet, pointing up with a foggy view at a mother who apologizes.

The choices, therefore, are predetermined. Novels work in a similar way; narrative is an allegory for determinism. While the characters seem to have choices, they are guided towards a fate that was decided for them by the writer. Labyrinths are the same; the wanderer has the illusion of choice each time the path forks, but if they choose incorrectly, they must turn back and take a different path. No matter how many times they choose, they are ultimately making their way towards an end or center within a constructed space, where the solution is only available to those who persisted and ended up on the right path. Walking the labyrinth, the wanderer might have the illusion of creating their own way, but they cannot change the design. A reader might wish for the novel to end differently, for a character to behave differently, to make different choices, but this is not possible, because the wanderer enters the maze only once it has already been completed by its creator. In her book on labyrinths, Charlotte Higgins writes that "[t]here is adversarial element in a maze: it is as if maker and walker are playing a game together, but with one of the contenders absent".[139] The god-like writer is nowhere to be found, and the paths are set. But the labyrinth of *Infinite Jest* is even wickeder than that, because it does not allow the characters to find an ending or the

[136] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 412.
[137] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 416. Italics original.
[138] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 320.
[139] Charlotte Higgins, *Red Thread: On Mazes and Labyrinths* (London: Jonathan Cape: 2018), 90.

story to come to a clean-cut conclusion. As Hayes puts it, the episodes that conclude the novel are the characters hitting bottom; they "illustrate the percolation of the dump at its most toxic, displaying the end results of believing in autonomy while being sutured into a complex system through multiple recursive loops".[140] Their fate is unavoidable; it is tragedy at its best.

However, this does not stop readers from trying to control the narrative outside the fictional universe of the novel itself. Because some of the threads are left loose, fans are able to create various theories regarding the storylines. Such theories transcend the determinist nature of the novel, not by actually creating new choices within the book itself, but outside of it, in the minds of the fans: it is purely imagined, but no less significant. For example, there are on-going discussions on fan-created forums and message boards regarding why Joelle van Dyne wears a veil. The book offers two alternatives, without ever clearly stating facts, which means that the decision is completely up to the reader. Joelle might be a member of the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed because she got injured in an acid-related accident, or because she is frighteningly beautiful, and fans of the novel have great fun arguing about the two. In the end, it is of little significance; Joelle is either disfigured by acid or by pulchritude, but it's still a disfigurement, and she wears the veil to cover it; the specifics do not matter. However, it does fork the narrative line and offers readers a choice. The very ending is also left open, and one is left to muse on Gately's recovery, the hinted possible romance with Joelle, and the future of Hal's mental health and addiction issues.

Infinite Jest also plays with the notion of reality versus fiction. Much like Borges, Wallace interlaces real references with fake ones; for example "M. Gilles Deleuze's posthumous *Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment"*.[141] While Deleuze is a real person, the book does not exist. This is of course academic parody, but it also invokes Borgesian interlacing between the real and the fake, further complicating the structure of the fictional narrative. Similarly, the real tennis players mentioned by Poutrincourt are mixed in with the fictional: Capriati, Cash, Arias, Krickstein are all young players who reached their career highs in the eighties or early nineties, while Esconja and Treffert appear to be made-up.[142] Some readers can ignore these details, as they are not exactly relevant to the story; others, eager to interpret the labyrinth, want to discover what is real and what is not. Esconja and Treffert might be fictional simply because the novel, which was written in 1996, presumably takes place some twenty years later, and the names are added to create a feeling

[140] Hayes, 695.
[141] Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 792.
[142] Wallace, *Infinite Jest,* 676.

of authenticity and continuance. However, this does not stop readers from speculating about the narrative, about what is real and what is not, and why. Some are convinced that there is a hidden meaning and spend hours deciphering the story: the results are the numerous internet boards and websites dedicated to the novel, of which *infinitejest.wallacewiki.com* is perhaps the vastest. As *polytropos* as the novel, it attempts to provide a red thread through the narrative. It features a map with all the real-world locations that correspond to the events taking place in the novel. The diagram by created Sam Potts that displays the connections between all the characters looks labyrinthine to a maze-lover's eye and provides not one, but three central points: the Enfield Tennis Academy, the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House, and Les Assassins en Fauteuils Roulants,[143] which correspond to the three main narrative paths.

One might state that the true center of the novel is the Entertainment, the film made by the late James Incandenza, the mystery of which is never solved. However, much like the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Entertainment does not offer the solution to the maze – instead, both the film and the rocket represent danger and the possibility of death. Furthermore, neither of them is ever found by those who seek them. As such, while they are the foci around which the labyrinths coil, they are also not centers in the traditional sense. Higgins mentions the fear of a labyrinth with no center, which she likens to Dante's *Inferno* – labyrinthine in some ways, but with no access to the middle and no way out.[144] A proper center as well as a way out is connected to salvation, to the wanderer being able to exit the maze with a clear understanding of its inner structure – something that is not possible in postmodern labyrinthine fiction. This reflects a society and material reality where we also cannot find truth or decipher the internal workings, which is in line with the postmodernist grim view of the world. While the labyrinth of *Infinite Jest* does not disintegrate (as it does in *Gravity's Rainbow*), it remains unresolved: the story does not end with a clean, happy ending, but circles back to the beginning. This contributes to the feelings of unease that the reader often experiences while reading this book, which is why the reading process can be disturbing.

Often, the book is almost cartoonish, as well as comical and ironic. Often, it is laugh-out-loud funny. However, this is intertwined with stories of traumatic childhoods, accounts of sexual and physical abuse, and vivid descriptions of torture. Cioffi writes that "scenes of

[143] *Infinite Jest Wiki*. 19 Aug. 2019. < https://infinitejest.wallacewiki.com/david-foster-wallace/index.php?title=Main_Page>.
[144] Higgins, 64.

exquisite horror and pain come in, as it were, under the radar, and hence make an enormous impact".[145] As he deducts, this disrupts the reading process, and is "ultimately disturbing".[146] The dark parts of the narrative, which are often presented in a gimmicky, comedic ways, bordering on the absurd, are laced into the more sober criticism of the ONANite social structure and cultural values, as well as the sad and realistic descriptions of depression and addiction. All of this, along with the temporal jumps, frequent flashbacks and the general disarray of the narrative play havoc with linearity and, while strongly engaging the reader, can also create a feeling of unease. Much like a wanderer in a dark and scary maze, finding one's way around this novel is not only difficult, but often unpleasant: one can never know if the next page holds something amusing or upsetting.

As Jay McInerney points out in his review of *Infinite Jest*, the book does not end with Hal, who is most commonly considered the protagonist; in the final chapters,

> it is the dogged attempt of the recovering addict Don Gately to reclaim the simple pleasures of everyday life that overshadows the athletic, intellectual and onanistic pyrotechnics of the Incandenzas – and makes this novel something more than an interminable joke.[147]

Considering that in the final parts of the book, Hal fears that he is also addicted, and even attempts to visit an AA meeting, it might mean that Hal's future might be similar to Gately's: he might just become a full-fledged addict who must work hard on his recovery. The nexus between the two comes into focus through their shared Disease. The book does not end on a conclusive note, nor does it explain everything. It is circular, not only because the very first chapter is chronologically the last, but also because the cycle of addiction repeats and repeats, *ad infinitum*. Reed Doob writes that "[t]he wicked see themselves as trapped in infinite circles, a temporal labyrinth with no goal, no ending that does not immediately transform itself into another beginning of the same ineluctable process".[148] She is writing about Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, but the point is related to what the characters (and often the readers) experience when they entangle themselves in *Infinite Jest* and the world it portrays as a circular and impenetrable labyrinth *in malo*.

---

[145] Cioffi, 162.
[146] Cioffi, 162.
[147] Jay McInerney, "'Infinite Jest'", review of *Infinite* Jest by David Foster Wallace in *The New York Times*, 3 Mar 1996, 18 Aug 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/03/news/infinite-jest.html>.
[148] Reed Doob, 81.

Chapter IV: The Trauma of Forking Paths

Out of the three novels discussed in this thesis, *House of Leaves* is the most obviously labyrinthine. It uses a maze as theme and form; it contains an actual labyrinth and uses the maze as a metaphor and symbol. The very structure of its narrative is forking, circular and self-referential. It expands its own fictional universe by referencing real authors and works, and complicates itself further by including fictional or semi-fictional references, often making the distinction between the two unclear or at least difficult to demarcate. The footnotes, appendices, letters, poems, pictures, and much more diversify the narrative, creating a maze of material through which the reader must find their way. As this chapter will show, the novel not only has a labyrinthine structure, but incorporates a labyrinth as a physical building as well as a metaphor for personal struggle. As with the previous two books, the labyrinth is minatory and structured in a way that can sometimes be confusing for the reader. *House of Leaves* delves deep into the labyrinthine intricacies of human psychology, personal trauma, and family relationships. However, as I will argue, walking the labyrinth of one's psyche is ultimately ineffective – characters do not find peace by exploring the labyrinth, but only once they manage to leave it behind. While at first glance it seems that the novel is about multiple different characters and stories, the final revelation is that it is self-reflexive, saying nothing beyond itself as a work of fiction.

Natalie Hamilton observes that "*House of Leaves* is a work of experimental fiction that, as a textual artifact, incorporates color, photos, graphics, and a unique textual layout, and is even crossreferenced with a musical album."[149] It contains three main narrative paths; the Navidson Record, Zampanò's notes about it, and Johnny Truant's commentary in footnotes. Additionally, there are the notes by the Editors, who supposedly published the book, and the many appendices that provide extra material. Zampanò, Truant and the Editors are all assigned different fonts, which are necessary for clarity, and which delineate their various paths for the reader to follow. The narratives interconnect and fold into and over one another in circular and looping ways, creating an almost dizzying effect and often leaving the reader to flip back or forth, trying to find their way through the maze.

[149] Natalie Hamilton, "The A-Mazing House: The Labyrinth as Theme and Form in Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50.1. 2008: 3.

Mark Z. Danielewski stated that what he likes about the book is "the circularity of it".[150] Circularity is one of the main attributes of the labyrinthine. Reed Doob writes that labyrinths are the "embodiment of paradox, its simultaneous affirmation of antinomies", such as "linearity/circularity";[151] this applies also to literary labyrinths, which navigate the linearity of a developing narrative while also creating winding, circular, forking paths to the center/s or the end. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, this holds especially true for *House of Leaves,* which is perhaps the most evidently and perfectly labyrinthine novel thus far written. However, the obviousness of the labyrinth and the almost too helpful clues threaten to make this novel seem too gimmicky – were it not for the combination of the sheer complexity of the hidden puzzles and the undeniable effect it has on at least some of its readers, one might want to compare it to cheap entertainment. However, while it certainly does entertain, it is not quite like one of the modern maze creations that cater a bit too much to the wanderer, making sure their fun level never drops. *House of Leaves* may not be as unforgiving to the reader as *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Infinite Jest*, but it is not afraid to haunt.

On the other hand, it has very little to say about society. The focus is on the internal workings of an individual's mind, their psychological profile, and their past trauma. The interpersonal relationships discussed are mainly those within a family – Johnny Truant and his mother, Will Navidson and Karen, or Will Navidson and his brother, to name a few. Because *House of Leaves* is so mazy and uses the labyrinthine metaphor on every narrative and structural level, it closes itself off from being able to comment on anything outside the maze. Everything circles directly back into itself; as the paragraphs below explain, even the physical labyrinth in the house turns out to be potentially only a metaphor for Truant's unreconciled issues with his mother. The metaphor of the maze symbolizes the psychological path in which Truant finds himself, but because of the closed-off nature of labyrinths the novel is unable to explore every factor behind the trauma – such as cultural and socio-economic external variables. It effectively loses itself in the maze it creates. However, the inability to engage with external reality either within the fictional universe or outside, here in the world, is in itself a symptom of how society is perceived in postmodernism: something to ignore rather than to reflect upon. The primary reaction of readers who love the book is to

[150] Scott Wampler, "EXCLUSIVE: We Had a Chat With Mark Z. Danielewski About That HOUSE OF LEAVES Script", *Birth.Movies.Death.* 16 Jul. 2018, 7 Oct. 2019 <https://birthmoviesdeath.com/2018/07/16/mark-z-danielewski-house-of-leaves-tv-show>.
[151] Reed Doob, 9.

delve deeper into the hidden mysteries – not to ask themselves what it says about the world in which it was written.

House of Leaves is at least partially about obsession and *House of Leaves* has bred obsession. Similarly to the other two novels considered in this thesis, the fans of this novel have created vast online universes to try and decipher the labyrinth. The level of dedication is as strange as it is impressive, as well as indicative of the apparent intention of this novel: to entrap and enchant its readers. As the labyrinth in the house haunts Navidson and his family, the film he makes about the house haunts Zampanò, and Zampanò's notes haunt Johnny Truant, so too can the book itself haunt its reader, stalk them, and create obsession. In the author's own words, "[w]hat it comes down to is how [the house] begins to influence those who live there and those who hear about it and those who write about it and maybe even those who read about it".[152] Some readers of *House of Leaves*, like its reviewer Steven Poole, devoured the entire massive volume in one sitting,[153] and the publication of this acclaimed debut "generated a tidal wave of buzz that was impossible to ignore".[154] The effect on the public and the readers was evidently great, and soon after the publication there were many fans who have taken too obsessively analyzing the novel page-by-page. Many of the fan-created posts and contributions were helpful in my deciphering and understanding not only the novel, but its influence on those who enter the labyrinth.

The physical labyrinth that the readers and characters encounter is the monumental maze that opens inside the Navidson family home. As Katharine Cox writes in her PhD thesis, the characters all suffer from their obsession with the labyrinth: "[t]hose who encounter the extremities of the house are all physically affected, from niggling ailments through to death",[155] and the effect is not only physical, but also mental; Karen's claustrophobia intensifies and the Navidson children are traumatized. Both Zampanò and Truant experience the effect of the maze indirectly, through their contact with secondary material – Zampanò supposedly through the film, the Navidson Record, and Truant through Zampanò's notes about it. Because of his suppressed issues, the consequences suffered by Truant are quite dire; he experiences paranoia, memory loss, and even loss of identity, to

[152] "Five minutes with Mark Z Danielewski," an interview with Mark Z Danielewski, *The Guardian,* 30 Nov. 2000. 7 Oct. 2019.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/30/guardianfirstbookaward2000.gurardianfirstbookaward>.
[153] Steven Poole, "Gothic scholar", *The Guardian*, 15 Jul. 2000, 7 Oct. 2019
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/30/guardianfirstbookaward2000.gurardianfirstbookaward>.
[154] Wampler, <https://birthmoviesdeath.com/2018/07/16/mark-z-danielewski-house-of-leaves-tv-show>.
[155] Cox, *Labyrinths,* 232.

name but a few. While the Navidsons navigate the maze in the house, Truant becomes increasingly lost in a psychological maze of his own creation.

The novel focuses strongly on the experience of the labyrinth and its emotional and psychological effects not only on the characters, but also on the reader. This seems intentional, and is indicated in Truant's introduction, where he directly addresses the reader (and perhaps himself):

> For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believed you once were. You'll detect slow and subtle shifts going on all around you, more importantly shifts in you. Worse, you'll realize it's always been shifting, like a shimmer of sorts, a vast shimmer, only dark like a room.[156]

In the rest of the novel, the word 'shift' is mainly used to described the movements of the walls in the maze in the house. The strong connection with personal psychology and childhood which is an important theme in the book indicates that the shifts in the physical maze are also the shifts in Truant's interior world, drawing a direct comparison between the two.

Because of the psychological and physical effects it has on all who encounter the labyrinth, however indirectly, the maze that appears in the Navidson home is a labyrinth *in malo*. Because it seems to mimic the mental states of the wanderer, it appears to be a labyrinth that reacts rather than a traditional labyrinth, which is built and then stays put. This makes the maze in the house significantly different from the classical labyrinths of antiquity. There is something self-absorbed in a story about a material structure that moves according to the internal workings of someone's emotions or thoughts – on the other hand, it is also indicative of the postmodern focus on the self and self-expression. Furthermore, it seems that the emotions to which the maze reacts are exclusively negative; it responds to the deepest fears and traumas of the explorers. Even those who do not seem to have obvious issues and to whom the maze in the house does not react so strongly can be affected. Jed Leeder, a minor character in the Navidson narrative, becomes a casual victim of the madness of Holloway Roberts, an explorer recruited by Will Navidson to help explore the house: Jed is shot when Roberts has a nervous breakdown in the maze and turns on his companions. Since the Navidson narrative is written at the pace and in the style of a horror film, it is not surprising that the maze contained within is a labyrinth *in malo*.

[156] Danielewski, xxii-xxiii.

An unexpected element is the maze's emptiness. Completely bare and charcoal grey, it does not contain anything. The characters in the Navidson narrative even observe that anything forgotten, or better yet, anything not actively kept in mind, can disappear. This disturbing phenomenon is explained by Wax: "you stop thinking about something and it vanishes. You forget you have pocket zippers and pow they're gone".[157] The house seems to at once lure the wanderers into a maze – it opens to them, it has a door – while on the other hand, it seems intent on expelling anything human from its insides. It is a paradox, one of the many times the novel seems to be at odds with itself. The purpose of disappearing zippers and supplies does not connect with the subsequent parts of the narrative in a meaningful way – it seems to merely serve to disorient, confuse, and to make the house seem spookier. On the other hand, the neon markers that are placed by the team and which they discover to have been torn connect to the mystery that is traced and pursued throughout the book: whether or not there is a monster in the labyrinth. All references to the Minotaur have been struck out by Zampanò, again without a clear purpose other than to add to the mystery – or perhaps to imply that the true Minotaur is not in the maze, but in the wanderer.

While the house in the Navidson Record may cause physical and mental harm to its explorers, and Zampanò's notes might lead to his death as well as cause Truant's mental breakdown, the novel *House of Leaves* is not a labyrinth *in malo*. Unlike the other two novels in this thesis, *House of Leaves* leads the reader rather neatly through the narrative lines. This is not readily apparent, but the book is full of clues that help the reader understand the events. According to Charlotte Higgins, the word clue comes from 'clewe', which "derives from Old English *cliwen* or *cleowen*, meaning a rounded mass, or a ball of thread".[158] The meaning now survives only as a metaphor, and yet "[e]very step towards solving a mystery, or a crime, or a puzzle, or the riddle of the self, is a length of yarn tossed us by the helping hand of Ariadne".[159] In the case of *The House of Leaves,* the author provides the clues that guide the understanding of the reader. The entirety of chapter V is devoted to echoes; on page 47, echolocation is mentioned and the physical properties of using sound to navigate are explained. This is followed by Navidson's solo exploration of the maze, titled "Exploration A", where he first discovers the massive hall and realizes the gigantic and impossible proportions of the space inside the house. He enters the great hall; when he turns around, he

[157] Danielewski,126.
[158] Higgins, 52.
[159] Higgins, 52.

can no longer see the entrance. He panics, and then exclaims "Oh god",[160] the echo of which returns to him. The words 'echo' and 'echolocation' are not mentioned in this paragraph – however the reader, having just learned about echolocation, knows that Navidson is able to find his way back by bouncing his shouts off the walls.

In another such exercise in didactics, Chapter VIII starts with the Oxford English Dictionary entry for SOS.[161] As one of the novel's fans, a contributor of the *House of leaves blog* notes, the signal bounces though the entire chapter VIII, reverberates through the Navidson storyline and footnotes to finally reveal itself as a message for Truant.[162] The observation is sound; the very last footnote of the chapter, the content of which has little to do with the events transpiring in the Navidson narrative, ends with Thumper, Truant's love interest, telling him "you just need to get out of the house".[163] For the reader, the pattern is the same as in chapter V; an issue is explained, then the findings are used to propel the narrative, guiding the reader through the literary labyrinth. Similarly, Chapter X includes a quote by Gaston Bachelard about an exhibition organized by the psychologist Françoise Minkowska on drawings of houses created by children who have been traumatized by the German occupation.[164] The quote serves as an explanation and basis for the reader's understanding of the drawings made by the Navidson children, Chad and Daisy, which are mentioned on page 313: the reader encountering the drawings made by Chad and Daisy is reminded of the Minkowska exhibition, and if they do not make the association themselves, a footnote refers them back to the Bachelard quote.

While the reader is helped with the navigation of the narrative lines, the structure of the novel in terms of the word placement, and the forks created by the footnotes, endnotes, and appendices can be a bit more confusing to negotiate. Chapter X, which describes at length the exploration of Navidson and his team into the labyrinth, creatively uses the boundaries of the physical page to vary the reading rhythm. The mostly-blank pages accelerate the tempo, which is then intermittently interrupted by footnotes. The text appears first only on the top of the pages, and later only on the bottom, representing the explorer's journey deeper into the maze. At some point, the words are spaced out in the middle of the page, mimicking a camera shutter; later, they dance around the page, and even simulate the

[160] Danielewski, 67.
[161] Danielewski, 97.
[162] "Chapter 8 page 97", *House of leaves blog*, 13 Mar. 2013, 11 Oct. 2019 <https://houseofleavesblog.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/chapter-8-page-97/>.
[163] Danielewski, 106.
[164] Danielewski, 189.

path of a bullet. In Chapter XX this becomes even more extreme, with words and sentences placed diagonally or upside-down, even including musical notes. In fact, the instances when the typography, word-placement and font changes are used to represent the events transpiring in the narrative are too many to enumerate.

The most elegant representation of the structure of the entire novel and the unstable labyrinth it contains is Chapter IX. It has so many side paths and circuitous meanders that it is impossible to not get lost in its structure. A blogpost by a fan traces no fewer than 33 possible paths, many of which loop, connect into other paths or come to a dead end. Many of the possible paths require skipping; according to the post author, the only way to leave the maze is the final path, no 33, which will get you to the end of the chapter.[165] Chapter IX follows the SOS chapter and contains most of the struck-out references to the Cretan myth. It also mentions the author Penelope Reed Doob and provides an etymology of the word 'labyrinth' – which happens to be incorrect. It mentions the Latin root for 'labor', but as indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the origins are more likely Greek and/or Lydian. A further labyrinthine blunder is the statement "one way out of any maze is to simply keep one hand on a wall and walk in one direction".[166] Henry Eliot writes that while this method worked on mazes built before the early nineteenth century, a new maze design was soon created to fumble wanderers, pioneered by Philip Henry Stanhope, who "included a number of free-standing hedges within his maze […] disconnecting the center from the boundary hedge".[167] Zampanò's notes claim that the hand-on-wall method is impossible because of the size of the labyrinth, but he is forgetting about the shifts in the maze – which might create disconnected sections, making the maze impervious to solving by keeping one's hand on a wall.

Regardless of this, Chapter IX is still a good example of a textual labyrinth. The footnotes that contain merely lists for long forks leading nowhere create that fatiguing effect of boredom indicative of many difficult mazes. The paths also send the reader outside the chapter, to appendices, which can make the reading of this particular section extremely long. The inclusion of color, crossed-out sections and non-traditional word placement further complicate the reading process, as do the poems in the middle and a bibliography at the very end. The text not only contains various fonts, but also italics, and sometimes turns sideways, upside-down, or is written in mirror-image. As with the rest of the novel, the Editors'

---

[165] S.G. Miller, "Chapter 9: Labyrinth", *House of leaves blog*, 11 May 2013, 21 Oct. 2019, <https://houseofleavesblog.wordpress.com/2013/05/11/chapter-9-labyrinth/>.
[166] Danielewski, 115.
[167] Eliot, 20.

footnotes offer a limited explanation of Truant's footnotes, which comment on Zampanò's contributions, which comment on the Navidson Record, thereby interconnecting the various narrative paths. One of the strangest footnotes not only in this chapter but the entire novel is footnote 144, which is contained in a box embedded in the page, piercing the texts through 26 pages (incidentally, ending on page 144). The very last square is completely black, and on the next page, there is a somewhat larger completely white square. This note, outlined in blue, a color in the text reserved for the word 'house', is a list of everything the house does not contain – and ends in a dark hole. As Mark B. N. Hansen observes in his essay on the novel, this list can never be completed: rather than emphasizing the emptiness of the house, it shows the limits of fiction: "the outside world punctures the closure of the fictional world in a particularly destabilizing manner, since this list could be extended infinitely".[168]

In an interview, Mark Z. Danielewski said that "most of the typographical setting [of the novel] is influenced by film",[169] and film is indeed a red thread that runs throughout the book. Ironically, it would be almost impossible to make *House of Leaves* into a feature film: the only attempt thus far by the author was to write a script for a series, which unfortunately never came to fruition.[170] Another strong theme is photography, and it is through the ethics of photojournalism that *House of Leaves* most acutely approaches meaningful criticism of society. A significant amount of Will Navidson's emotional trauma and issues stem from residual guilt and effects of public backlash that followed the publication of his Pulitzer prize-winning photograph of a starving girl in Sudan. Navidson's picture of the girl is based on a real photograph known as "The vulture and the little girl" taken in 1993 by Kevin Carter. Like Navidson, Carter won a Pulitzer Prize for the photograph, but along with the praise came intense criticism, with the public questioning his choice to take the picture rather than to help. Carter died of suicide a few months after having received his award. Ironically, the "photo riveted the world and directed attention to the devastating famine in the country".[171] In a classic Western reaction, the world both blamed the photographer for taking a sensational photo and flocked to help – which they did not do prior to its publication. The

[168] Mark B. N. Hansen, "The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski's "House of Leaves"," *Contemporary Literature* 45.4 Winter 2004: 609.
[169] "Five minutes with Mark Z Danielewski," an interview with Mark Z Danielewski, *The Guardian,* 30 Nov. 2000. 7 Oct. 2019.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/30/guardianfirstbookaward2000.gurardianfirstbookaward>.
[170] William Hughes, "Mark Z. Danielewski's script for a House Of Leaves TV pilot is just as bewildering and fascinating as the book", *The A.V. Club*, 11 July 2018, 21 Oct. 2019, <https://news.avclub.com/mark-z-danielewskis-script-for-a-house-of-leaves-tv-pi-1827526193>.
[171] Maaza Mengiste, "We must not look away from the crises in Africa" *The Guardian*, 31 July 2014, 28 Nov. 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/31/world-tired-africas-tragedies-look-harder>.

irony is unmistakable, but *House of Leaves* does not engage with the problems of ethics or public reaction – instead, it focuses on the psychological consequences for the photographer. While the issue of the girl's fate and the ethical implications of his photography are a matter of public's discussion, Will Navidson treats his pain as personal. He gives the girl a private name, Delial, and shares her with no-one, not even Karen. He hides from the mess of the public condemnation and praise by creating an internal space for Delial and the feelings of guilt that her memory invokes. So even though photography, filmography and film feature heavily in the novel, the greater focus is on the personal trauma, childhood memories, and mental issues of all characters. And while the Navidson narrative in some ways relates to external reality, the Johnny Truant narrative fully prioritizes the internal labyrinth Truant enters once he starts exploring Zampanò's notes.

The very structure of the novel is self-reflexive, and is even described through Truant's observations of his own personal journey through Zampanò's notes:

> the old man and his book, briefly appearing, maybe even intruding, then disappearing again; sometimes pale, sometimes bleeding, sometimes rough, sometimes textureless; frequently angry, frightened, sorry, fragile or desperate, communicated in moments of motion, smell and sound, more often than not in skewed grnnnr, a mad rush broken up by eidetic recollections.[172]

This shows how Zampanò's notes are slowly affecting Truant and stirring recollections – on the other hand, it also describes the experience of the reader, who encounters not only the old man, but Truant's trauma in a similar fashion. The very beginning of this chapter contains a tick on the bottom right corner of the page; this tick is connected to the letters Truant's mother Pelafina wrote to her son from the Whalestoe Institute. Her story and the letters are further developed in a separate book by Danielewski, *The Whalestoe Letters*, one of the two works outside the novel that refer directly to the *House of Leaves* (the other being "Haunted", a music album by Danielewski's sister Poe), forming a wider labyrinthine universe related to the fictional work. In one of her letters contained in Appendix II-E to the novel, an increasingly paranoid Pelafina requests Truant to "place in your next letter a check mark in the lower right hand corner"[173] to indicate that her letters are being delivered to him.

The reason for this check mark being placed on page 97 of the novel has been extensively discussed on various *House of Leaves* fan boards. The theory that seems the most

[172] Danielewski, 106.
[173] Danielewski, 609.

plausible is that the entire book is a letter to Pelafina, and the check mark being placed at the beginning of the SOS chapter indicates a cry for help. In another letter, of May 8, 1987, she asks her young son to decipher the true message by reading only the first letter of every word; these reveal a disturbing missive in which she writes that she is being raped by her caregivers. As the fans of the *MZD Forum* note, the letter includes another secret message composed of randomly placed capital letters, and which most probably reads “A FACE IN A CLOUD NO TRACE IN THE CROWD”. It is unclear what this is supposed to mean beyond proving Pelafina’s mental confusion. While this letter is the most complicated puzzle Pelafina sends to Truant, it is not the only one; she also includes quotes in foreign languages and encourages him to learn their meaning. Partially because she is paranoid, and partially to educate her son, she is creating a labyrinth of letters for him to solve like a riddle. As one of the quotes included in Zampanò’s notes puts it: “Riddles: they either delight or torment”,[174] and the effect the letters have on the young Truant does indeed seem to be both.

Meanwhile, the adult Truant is starting to have panic attacks. Through his contact with Zampanò’s notes, he begins to remember bits and pieces from his own childhood and the traumatic events that led to his mother’s institutionalization, his mental health slowly declining as a result. Even though all the references to the Minotaur are struck from the text, it eventually becomes clear that there is indeed a monster – just not in the house. The true Minotaur is internal and psychological and exists in the form of emerging repressed memories; as Cox writes, for Truant, “[n]ightmarish visions combine the violence of his mother with the beast at the heart of the labyrinth”.[175] Quite early in the novel, one of these anxiety attacks leaves Truant with scratches on the back of his neck, and later on in the story we learn that his mother had possibly tried to strangle him as a child, leaving marks in that very place. Truant’s panic attack begins as a feeling of being hunted by a looming shadow and manifests as the terror of being asphyxiated. The description of the attack is contained in a footnote which follows this sentence in Zampanò’s notes: “nothing visible to the eye provides a reason for or even evidence of those terrifying shifts which can in a matter of moments reconstitute a simple path into an extremely complicated one”.[176] Truant’s free association is related to the phrase “nothing visible to the eye”, but it is clear that the shifts and reconstituting paths, increasingly more complicated, are also connected to the psychological labyrinth he is trying to navigate.

[174] Danielewski, 33.
[175] Cox, *Labyrinths,* 250.
[176] Danielewski, 69.

The end of this Truant's footnote leads the reader to a note by the Editors, who send them to Appendices II-D (his father's obituary) and II-E (his mother's letters from Whalestoe). The reader is presented with a choice: "[t]he reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, however, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his past may wish to proceed ahead".[177] The fork in the path is so clear it is reminiscent of the Choose Your Own Adventure book series; in this novel, it really is up to the reader to navigate the narrative and decide on how the storyline will proceed. Some readers might skip Truants notes (and if the fan boards are to be believed, many do) and read only the Navidson and Zampanò sections, while others might read Truant's footnotes, but not the Appendices, thus ignoring the psychological puzzle of his past. Truant himself directly addresses the reader at the beginning of the novel and suggests as much: "The way I figure it, if there's something you find irksome—go ahead and skip it. I couldn't care less how you read any of this".[178] Some readers might even focus solely on the footnotes, ignoring the story about the Navidson family. The book is designed to create choice, and choosing one path over the other might very well turn it into quite a different narrative. Jumping down the rabbit hole that is Truant's personal past certainly puts the rest of the novel into a new perspective. It also requires patience and commitment; the Whalestoe Letters are almost 60 pages long and form quite a detour from the Navidson narrative. However, they seem at least on some level to constitute the core of the story; after all, familial relationships are also an important theme in the Navidson Record, and let us not forget that the labyrinth does, after all, appear in a family home.

Katharine Cox's article on the familial relationships in the *House of Leaves* states that the "reconciliation within the family unit offered by the Navidsons act as an analogy for the tortured and mysterious story of Truant and Pelafina; they too mask a secret that is confronted and finally resolved in the space of the labyrinth".[179] At the end of the novel, the Navidson family relations do seem to improve, or at least be improving. The initial purpose of buying the house, for Will Navidson to become closer to his family, seems to have been achieved – even though this can only be accomplished by them leaving the labyrinth behind. However, it is less clear if the same can be said about Johnny Truant. While the reader, if they so choose, can slowly unravel the tangled knot that is Truant's childhood, it is not

[177] Danielewski, 72.
[178] Danielewski, 31.
[179] Katharine Cox, "What Has Made Me? Locating Mother in the Textual Labyrinth of Mark Z. Danielewski's "House of Leaves"", *Critical Survey* 18.2. 2006: 6.

evident that the protagonist himself has found peace. His narrative line ends not with a personal account, but with a story of a child born with deformities, who finally dies – or better yet, is let go. This does indicate closure, perhaps even an end to Truant's issues with his mother, but the fact that he uses an analogy, as well as the uncertainty and blurriness that permeate the preceding paragraphs show that not all is well. While the Navidsons seem to escape the house, Truant perhaps cannot, or cannot yet. He remains in the labyrinth, which might have been of his own creation, built for the very purpose of unraveling the mystery of his past. In fact, there are several clues in the novel that point to Truant being the author of the entire story about the film, as well as of Zampanò's notes.

One of the indications for this is the aforementioned check mark on page 97. Another mystery that appears in the novel, but has little connection to the Record, is the Pelican poem series. The poems are first mentioned in Chapter IX, and it is implied through an extremely wandering set of footnotes that they were written by Zampanò. As he puts in footnote 171: "where a young man will forgive the stray,[177] an old man will cut it out".[180] Footnote 177, again by Zampanò, is in red and struck out, but mentions "PXXXXXXX poems", and leads to footnote 178, written by Truant: "i.e. The Pelican Poems[179]",[181] which would imply that the poems were written by Zampanò. Footnote 179 is by the Editors, leading to Appendix II-B and the poems themselves. However, Appendix II contains additional notes provided by Truant, which were not necessarily part of original Zampanò's notes. The settings and dates of the Pelican Poems correspond to Truant's travels in Europe as a youth, which are recounted in footnote 318 and mentioned in Pelafina's letter of November 27, 1988, where she calls it "tramping over the continent for four months with only a backpack, a Pelican pen and a few hundred dollars".[182] A reader might notice that 'PXXXXXXX' does not correspond to 'Pelican', as there is an extra X: as some of the fans on the *MZD Forum* suggest, the number of Xs might refer to Pelafina,[183] creating a link between Zampanò and Truant's mother. Therefore it becomes likely that Truant's comment "i.e. The Pelican Poems" does not mean the poems were written by the old man, but rather that Truant might wish they could be struck out. However, they are included, which creates a discrepancy. The connection between Zampanò and Pelafina is never explained, and another mystery opens: who really is Johnny Truant? First presented as crude and grammatically inelegant, the novel

[180] Danielewski, 137.
[181] Danielewski, 138.
[182] Danielewski, 638.
[183] "Pelican Poems & HoL", *MZD Forums*, 11 Dec. 2002-7 Jan. 2003, 19 Oct. 2019 <http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/house-of-leaves/house-of-leaves-aa/1276-pelican-poems-hol>.

slowly reveals the more sensitive, intelligent, and erudite side of the young man. The reader learns that his European travels were funded by a prize for an essay he wrote. It is also obvious his mother must have been quite educated – and one should keep in mind that editing and compiling Zampanò's notes would require a lot of focus and at least some understanding of the material, even though Truant often confesses to gaps in knowledge.

The novel itself also contains continuity errors. N. Katherine Hayles writes about a certain part in the story, where Zampanò describes Navidson's reactions while watching a video of his common-law wife, Karen, kissing the young explorer Wax. As she points out, "how can Zampanò possibly know how Navidson viewed this scene?"[184] There is no video of Navidson's reaction, which means that all the subsequent intense scholarly analysis of this scene by various academics, described in Zampanò's notes, is also put to question. Furthermore, the sense of authenticity, meticulously constructed through the detailed notes, footnotes, appendices and other abundance of "proof" has already fallen apart at the very beginning – Zampanò was blind, and could not have seen any of the Navidson film. The intricate maze is therefore constructed around an impossible premise; the only way the labyrinth can exist is as a metaphor, and everything that seems true can be called into question.

Most importantly, there is the five and a half minute hallway. The hallway itself is one of the first anomalies appearing in the Navidson house and serves as the entrance to the labyrinth, and "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" is the first part of the Navidson Record to have surfaced. At first, it was not taken seriously, but as the other parts of the film, the Explorations, started to make the underground film circuit, and once the full film was released, "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" and the rest of the Record created an obsession in the media and academia – articles were written, people dedicated books to the topic. However, when in the later part of the book Truant encounters the band that plays the song "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway", they tell him that the inspiration for it is not the film, but the book. In fact, it is *House of Leaves,* claiming to be the first edition. The fictional universe in Zampanò's notes, where the film exists, does not correspond to the fictional universe of Truant, where the book exists. However, because Navidson in his final exploration of the house actually reads the book (it is quite inexplicably the only reading material he brings into the labyrinth), slowly burning each finished page to provide enough

[184] N. Katherine Hayles, "Saving the Subject: Remediation in House of Leaves", *American Literature* 74.4 Dec. 2002: 787.

light to read the next one, the fictional existence of the book also retroactively pierces the Zampanò and Navidson universes. The narrative realities as presented respectively by Zampanò and Truant are as impossible as the very existence of the labyrinth in house: according to the calculations included in the novel, the labyrinth's size would surpass the very circumference of the Earth. This implies that all the narrative paths might simply be the artificially created labyrinth of Truant's psyche – where he enters the mental maze through the suppressed memory of the five and a half minutes when his mother attempted to murder him. Towards the very end of the novel, Truant says: "I forgot the whole thing. Like a bad dream, the details of those five and a half minutes just went and left me to my future."[185] But an even simpler explanation for the lack of credibility is that the novel's main message is that none of it is true – it's just fiction, just a book.

While the book continually attempts to provide evidence to its own authenticity through various references and academic-style quotes, this is merely tongue-in-cheek, as nothing fits as neatly as it could. Quite possibly the most important message was already conveyed in the very first sentence: "This novel is a work of fiction"[186] Fiction, after all, is not reality – but rather a way to explain it, and perhaps a way to escape from it. The continuity errors, the possible narrative lines, and the mixture of fictional and real external references embedded in the notes play with the very idea of what is real and what is not. A novel referring to its own fictionality has become somewhat of a postmodern cliché, which often cuts off any possibility of external reference, preventing postmodern fiction from making a serious point about the material reality. Such self-reflexivity is also a labyrinthine feature, and the unreliability only further complicates the literary maze. On the other hand, this is a part of why this novel is so intriguing to readers. The entertainment it provides through its combination of the playful, the spooky, and the psychologically intense narrative variations, along with the long and winding, but also boring sections juxtaposed with action-packed sequences all create an intricate and unique literary maze. The very placement of the words on the page, which is not always linear and often requires the reader to flip the book sideways or upside-down add to the complexity. It might seem too much like a contrivance, a mere stunt – but the permeating feeling of the uncanny counteracts the gimmick with depth and darkness. Much like the maze in the house, which contains infinitely large and murky spaces, the reader discovers the black hole within Truant's psyche as another labyrinth to

[185] Danielewski, 517
[186] Danielewski, edition notice.

explore. However, as Truant's mental health disintegrates and he begins to question his very reality, we learn that entering a psychological labyrinth is anything but a path to salvation. The implications are rather daunting – focusing on the internal and the psychological without acknowledging the role of the external world might just cause great damage and cause one to get lost within their disconnected self.

Chapter V: The Media Library of Babel

The final chapter covers a range of postmodern mazes in order to present the wide variety of labyrinths that we encounter in our time – not only novels, but also other forms of labyrinthine narratives. While the first chapter included a discussion of the history of labyrinths and the concept of labyrinthine narratives and fiction, this chapter focuses on various forms of labyrinths in postmodernism. In addition to books, it includes other popular media, such as the internet, TV series and video games, as well as other possible labyrinths, such as cities. It explores the correlation between infinity, finitude, and labyrinths now and in the past, as well as the roles of the ideas of personal choice, freedom and control that are characteristic of postmodern mazes. Traditionally, other works on labyrinthine fiction do not exit the realm of the printed word; however, an important point can be made by including other media – if for no other reason than their prevalence in our time. The phenomenon of the internet, streaming services, and video games constitute a significant or perhaps even the most common way for people to consume contemporary labyrinthine forms of entertainment and mazy narratives, which is why they cannot be ignored. However, this does not mean that literature is yielding its place either as a form of entertainment or serious social criticism – the extensive online following of the three main books covered in this thesis proves as much. There is also a practical reason for continued popularity of these labyrinthine novels: they would not be able to function well as narratives in any other media, as their very labyrinthine structure demands the printed form. The use of different fonts, unusual placement of the words on the page, and other typographical characteristics are a part of what forms the labyrinthine structure, as are the footnotes and the endnotes that would be impossible to effectively translate into, for example, a video format.

However, this does not mean that other forms of media cannot be labyrinthine – they can also include labyrinthine narratives, be very complex, as well as create choices for the wanderer. Hence, similarities can be drawn between the textual and the non-textual labyrinthine works. Of course, not all of the four criteria set out in the first chapter can apply to the latter; however, the maziness of the audio-visual works mentioned below is indisputable, and they form an altogether different type of postmodern labyrinth that it would be remiss to ignore. Like physical labyrinths, which can have different shapes, forms, and meanings, fictional labyrinthine narratives can take on many forms, and be intended for a wide audience. Some of most common types of physical mazes encountered in contemporary

times are corn mazes or mirror mazes at fun fairs, which are primarily intended for the entertainment of children and families. Labyrinths can therefore be created for all ages to enjoy, and indeed some of the most popular forms of labyrinthine books have been written for children.

Choose Your Own Adventure books are a trademarked book series in the gamebook genre, and are possibly some of the most obvious multicursal books that demand reader participation and in which the reader can influence the outcome of the story. Because of their popularity, the name or the acronym CYOA is now commonly used to describe other, similar gamebooks. First published in 1979, the Choose Your Own Adventure series contains 184 titles and has by now been translated into 40 languages. According to the CYOA website, the books "featured every known literary genre",[187] which means that what forms the red thread in the book series is the structure of the books rather than the genre. They are in effect a maze that encourages the young reader to participate in the formation of the narrative. As the CYOA website states, the books were created to simulate role-play and have their roots in video games – indeed, there are many similarities between certain video games and mazes, primarily because of the choices presented to the player/wanderer. As with the three novels covered in the previous chapters, all of these labyrinthine forms are multicursal, which further strengthens the point that postmodernism is no place for unicursal mazes. At the bottom of every page of the CYOA books, the reader is instructed to choose what to do next. Sometimes, they are simply asked to continue to the next page, while other times, they have two or more forks to choose from, after which they must flip to the chosen page and continue reading from there. Each of the books contains multiple endings, some of which are dead ends that do not complete the narrative – nevertheless, even the readers who make it to the envisaged desired outcome inevitably skip several of the narrative options: the only way to take every path is to return to the beginning and try again, which many of the readers are more than willing to do. However, while the books claim to include the reader in the creation of the narrative, they are in fact merely choosing from what is offered, and are steering rather than co-creating the narrative, all of which are characteristics of labyrinthine works of fiction.

Much like the three novels that have been analyzed in this thesis, CYOA books have dedicated fan pages and a strong online following. The *ChooseYourStory* website is a place for CYOA enthusiasts to submit their own versions of forking narratives, and includes an

[187] "HISTORY OF CYOA", *Choose Your Own Adventure*, 30 Oct. 2019, <https://www.cyoa.com/pages/history-of-cyoa>.

active forum. A fascinating effect the CYOA books have is on education: because of the compelling narrative and the "hook" of reader participation, they are often used as a teaching tool in classrooms worldwide, helping children and ESL students to improve their reading skills. However, as Katherine Luck and others noted, the stories are mainly dark and plenty of endings lead to death. As Luck writes, the books are reminiscent of the "terrors of a bad acid trip".[188] This is perhaps why the books attract adults almost as much as they do children – it is the minatory labyrinth that creates a thrill for all ages. However, as with plenty of postmodern labyrinths, the main objective is fun; the books, however scary some might be, were made to intrigue and to entertain. Because the limited labyrinthine structure of a children's book can only contain so many options, and because the thrill is essentially artificial, the young labyrinth wanderer can quite safely become lost in the narrative world.

Obviously, CYOA are intended to be enjoyed by children and teenagers, and were not created to be a critique of society or a cynical parody of reality. However, there are other labyrinthine creations that attempt to do just that, such as *Bandersnatch,* a stand-alone episode of the Netflix hit series "Black Mirror" released in December 2018. It is difficult to classify this work as either an episode or a film; one critic mentions it has also been called a video game, while she sees it as "more of an ecosystem".[189] This is because it represents an emergence of what might become a new genre in television: an interactive narrative. The episode (as it will be referred to henceforth for the sake of simplicity), the length of which depends on the taken path, is based on video games and the concept of viewer participation. The labyrinth in *Bandersnatch* is threefold; firstly, we encounter it as the structure of the episode itself, a multicursal branching maze that forces us to make choices and participate in the narrative. As active participants, we are first given the illusion of responsibility, which is later replaced with the realization that our choices are still manipulated by the underlying script. Secondly, we encounter the protagonist Stefan's psychological labyrinth, his childhood memories and increasing sense of paranoia, which culminates in his questioning his choices and the very notion of free will. Lastly, the episode attempts to reach outside itself to reveal a massive, infinite labyrinth of "reality", where once again, there is no free will and we are controlled by sinister forces.

---

[188] Katherine Luck, "The darkest secrets of Choose Your Own Adventure books", *the delve*, 16 June 2018, 30 Oct. 2019, <https://the-delve.com/2018/06/16/choose-your-own-adventure/#dread>.

[189] Margaret Lyons, "'Bandersnatch' Has Many Paths, but Do Any of Them Add Up to Anything?", *The New York Times*, 4 Jan. 2019, 3 Nov. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/04/arts/television/bandersnatch-black-mirror-netflix.html>.

The viewer can make choices for the protagonist, Stefan Butler, and thus becomes the co-navigator of the storyline. Stefan is creating a videogame entitled Bandersnatch, which is based on a CYOA type book also entitled Bandersnatch. As opposed to the aforementioned CYOA books, this gamebook is seemingly intended for adults, as it is much longer and has a much more complex storyline. The video game Stefan is creating has a maze-like structure, and with its branching corridors even looks like a multicursal maze. It gives the players ten seconds to choose from two options at each narrative fork – the same as the viewer has when watching the episode. While the different story paths lead to different endings, the entire episode mainly deals with two issues; childhood trauma and the concept of free will. Much like in *House of Leaves,* Stefan has trouble coping with childhood memories of his mother, and a lot of the narrative revolves around his mental health issues, which all converge around a single childhood memory of the morning before his mother's death. But what pushes him over the edge is the increasing feeling that he being manipulated by an external force – quite early in the episode, he talks to his therapist about the uncontrollable urge to make a particular choice, which to him does not seem to be his own. This sets the stage for his subsequent mental collapse resulting from paranoia and a sense of having zero control over his own actions. On the other hand, the sense of not being in control also exculpates him of guilt when he finally murders his father. As is mentioned in a path in the episode, "if you follow that line of thinking to its logical conclusion, then you're absolved of any guilt from your actions".[190] Stefan concludes he is but a puppet, and as a result, his mental stability becomes compromised.

Another significant theme in the episode is the idea of multiple realities, which is mainly communicated by the character Colin Ritman, a video game designer whom Stefan admires. Multiple realities, in which endless counterparts of oneself choose different paths and live different outcomes depending on their choices, are a popular theme in contemporary television, at least on Netflix, and are intermingled with the idea of fate and one's inability to truly control one's life. Personal choice and consequences thereof are the main concept behind *Russian Doll*, one of the episodes of which is entitled *Ariadne.* In the series, the main character is caught in a repeating time loop, trying to make the correct choices in a maze of entangled paths that would help her escape the predicament in which she finds herself. Another series that includes a labyrinthine metaphor is *The OA*, which delves into the idea of multiple realities and contains several references to Jorge Luis Borges. These series use

[190] *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, prod. Netflix, dir. David Slade, 2019.

modern popular tropes such as time travel and questions about time, space and the very fabric of reality alongside the idea of a labyrinth. The resulting combination is still a maze, but one whose form is not a single, self-contained unit, isolated from the external world – instead, it branches into infinity and encompasses everything.

This is not the first time the metaphor of the labyrinth has been used to describe the totality of existence: Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco are among the authors who view the universe as a sort of labyrinth. In her book, Reed Doob writes that the circular form of medieval mazes was meant to represent "the shape of the world, the universe, eternity".[191] The aforementioned TV series build on this medieval idea, and on the ideas of Borges and Eco, adding the trope of multiple realities and infinite universes. Consequently, the resulting shape is no longer a circle: when married with the idea of multiple realities, labyrinthine circularity not only becomes layered, but also infinitely branched, creating an incomprehensible labyrinthine structure presumably underlying everything. This creates a sort of labyrinthine sublime, the "delightful horror"[192] of not just infinity, but infinite divergent possibilities that branch in an infinite number of directions. The overall experience is positive, yet it manages to contain the thrill of the unknown and the terrible. It is easily exploited as a form of entertainment; however it is unclear if it manages to communicate anything serious beyond that. Postmodern labyrinthine narratives tend to use difficult topics not to make concrete points about either reality or the society in which we live, but rather to excite whomever is consuming the story.

Coupled with the sense of being manipulated, of having no free will, no responsibility, and no control over one's own actions, as in *Bandersnatch*, the labyrinth-as-universe takes on a spookier tinge and enters the genre of conspiracy and paranoia that are characteristic of much postmodernist fictional narratives. This is complemented by the confined nature of the traditional labyrinth, an enclosed structure with a beginning and an end (or ends), which *Bandersnatch* also resembles. The viewer presses play and the viewer eventually stops watching; regardless of what happens in between these two actions, they both form boundaries to the labyrinth contained within. In one of the possible endings in *Bandersnatch,* in which the video game is released and very successful, Stefan mentions having limited the number of choices, so that in the end, the player only has the illusion of choice while their actions are in fact controlled by the game's creator. With this path,

[191] Reed Doob, 103.
[192] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 67.

Bandersnatch once again draws the parallel between the video game and the episode itself: it is trying to subvert the idea of free will by exposing it as a sham, creating a twist within the story. The implication is obviously that since both the player and the viewer are guided by unforeseen forces, we should reconsider and ponder the very nature of reality and our universe, in which the world is far more deterministic than we would have (presumably) hoped. However, the twist is not as effective as it might be, since at that point, the viewer already knows that some of the choices they are making are forced: as at least two critics pointed out, very early in the episode the only way to even continue with the story is for Stefan to turn down a job offer. Without that particular choice, the episode runs into a dead end. For Aisha Harris, this mars the experience, as the construction proves itself to be too artificial, and for her, it's "the "decisions" masquerading as free will that are really frustrating".[193]

However, not all critics agree. For Howard Chai, that is exactly the point; drawing connections to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he almost gleefully states:

> Like Stefan, we are constantly being programmed and controlled … We're all just stuck in an endless maze, consuming and consuming, thinking it's all a happy game. We're given choices. We're told that we have free will, that we're in control of our lives, but we're not. It's all a grand illusion. They are in control. The Party. The System. The Machine. It's a nightmare world. And we live in it.[194]

However, while *Nineteen Eighty-Four* criticizes and warns about the emergence of a control-and-manipulate society, *Bandersnatch* is closer to an attempt to normalize it. The sinuous system of control is exposed by Netflix, part of "the system", and presented as entertainment. Through this, any true criticism of overreach is neutralized; contained within the very structure being criticized, it is a part of the structure and therefore rendered benign. It is such exercises in circularity and self-containment that result in our easy acceptance of the "nightmare world". However, what is truly nightmarish is not the world itself, but the casual manner in which we embrace it. Fredric Jameson wrote of the "offensive features" of postmodernism which, failing to scandalize, are "not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official or

---

[193] Aisha Harris, "'Bandersnatch' Has Many Paths, but Do Any of Them Add Up to Anything?", *The New York Times*, 4 Jan. 2019, 3 Nov. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/04/arts/television/bandersnatch-black-mirror-netflix.html>.

[194] Howard Chai, "The Illusion of Control in 'Black Mirror: Bandersnatch'", *Medium*, 1 Jan. 2019, 3 Nov. 2019 <https://medium.com/s/story/black-mirror-bandersnatch-a-study-guide-c46dfe9156d>.

public culture of Western society",[195] and one can easily add living in a (perceived) techno-dystopia to the list. The effect is postmodern-labyrinthine; a network of forking paths that fold back on themselves, circuitously leading nowhere, creating a sense of topographagnosia.

As previously mentioned, mazes and video games have plenty in common; one of the most popular arcade games ever, Pac-Man, is based on a maze. In fact, it is not only the visual results, the games, that have labyrinthine properties; the underlying code itself can be maze-like. The book *10 PRINT CHR$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10*, which is about the titular line of code, devotes a chapter to the connection between software and mazes, and the cultural association and implications that this evokes. The authors point out that one of the most important differences between mazes as described by Matthews and Reed Doob and the mazes in computing is finitude:

> As material, architectural structures, mazes have a finite size. But there is no limit to how long 10 PRINT can be left running […] the program exists in between the two definitions of maze: a physical structure on the one hand and an intricate confusion on the other.[196]

Much like Pac-Man does not have an ending, there is no limit to how long this simple line of code can be left running, recreating a 2-dimensional multicursal maze; because they do not exist in physical space, they are not limited by physical restraints. Furthermore, not only programs can be seen as labyrinthine; one might view the entire phenomenon of the internet as a giant and infinite branching structure. To be sure, the internet might be more readily described as a rhizome; however, there are obvious comparisons to be drawn between the online world and a labyrinth.

One of the obvious problems that arise is the paradoxical connection and dislocation between the self-contained labyrinth and the concept of infinity. A possible explanation is that, unable to imagine infinity, humans tend to conceptualize the abstract and the infinite as spaces – hence the term cyber*space*. The comparison with labyrinth, as Kristin Veel notes, follows naturally, since "[t]he labyrinth has been a recurrent motif and design of navigation in numerous cultures and mythologies".[197] Consequently, while the traditional labyrinth is considered to always be a complete and finite structure, this definition becomes muddled when combined with never-ending cyberspace. The definition of the labyrinthine is already

---

[195] Jameson, 4.

[196] Nick Montfort, et al., *10 PRINT CHR$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012) 33.

[197] Kristin Veel, "The Irreducibility of Space: Labyrinths, Cities, Cyberspace", *Diacritics* 33.3/4. Autumn – Winter 2003: 153.

vast, so using the labyrinth as a metaphor for the internet is perhaps taking things a bit too far. Much like printed books can be considered the more "traditional" media, the mazy structures of labyrinthine novels are also representations of more traditional labyrinths, and are therefore truer to the original form. Furthermore, the experience of reading *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* would be quite different if read on a digital medium, where the specific labyrinthine performance required from the readers in flipping back and forth would be lost – which is directly opposite to computer programs, which count on the screen for their three-dimensional labyrinth to come to life.

In fact, it seems that we prefer to create and consume literature in a more traditional form. In the early nineties, many thought that hypertext fiction would take the literary world by storm – but the idea never truly took hold. In an article for *Wired*, Steven Johnson claims that it is because hypertext stories "were incredibly difficult to *write* […] creating a whole host of technical problems".[198] And while Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* and Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* were important works in hypertext fiction, they hardly started a revolution in literature – perhaps because "traditional" novels are the preference of writers or readers. Furthermore, if one of the goals of hypertext fiction is for readers to become participants in the story rather than remain passive, the three novels explored in this thesis along with other labyrinthine fiction prove that hyperlinks are not necessary to create the sense of participation and exploration. In the meantime, hypertext has, rather than transforming literature, had a profound impact on the way we read and write news stories, blogs, commentaries, recipes, or anything else found online. As Johnson writes, it turns out that hypertext, while unsuitable for literature, works remarkably well with short chunks of texts, "written by different authors, publishing on different sites",[199] all connected through hyperlinks.

On the other hand, there have been direct comparisons made between *House of Leaves* and the internet; in his essay on the novel, David Vichnar makes a claim for *House of Leaves* as "a print novel for the digital age, a book that privileges print while tapping into the digital network, a printed text that exists hypertextually".[200] He states that the novel surpasses that form of a textual labyrinth by existing in a digital world, where the fan boards and forums can extend the reproduction and discussion *ad infinitum*. His bases his argument on a

[198] Steven Johnson, "Why No One Clicked on the Great Hypertext Story". *Wired*. 16 April 2013. 11 Nov. 2019. <https://www.wired.com/2013/04/hypertext/>. Italics original.
[199] Johnson, <https://www.wired.com/2013/04/hypertext/>.
[200] David Vichnar, "Mark Danielewski's House of Leaves as hypermedia", *Equus Press*, 23 June 2014, 11 Nov. 2019 <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/internetting-the-book/>.

note in the novel made by the fictional Editors, who propose that any additional information provided by the public could be added to subsequent editions. As Vichnar writes, "[s]uch fictional promises to amend the book acknowledge that in a digital age, wherein information can be easily altered and updated, the book is never a discrete and complete object but always a node in an ever-changing network of information".[201] In this zoomed-out view, anything produced and put out into the world that gets picked up by others is no longer a completed thing, but subject to alteration and change – which works if we view these alterations as changes in how the book is interpreted and understood, rather than real changes made to its text. Clearly, there is an argument to be made for *House of Leaves* as a book that surpasses its own printed form, as there are arguments to be made for the internet itself as a labyrinthine or rhizomatic structure. After all, labyrinthine books tend to encompass a multitude of other genres and forms (similarly to the aforementioned encyclopedic works), and refuse to be easily pigeonholed.

Further exploring the connection between rhizomes as described by Deleuze and Eco, Kristin Veel notes that the rhizome can be viewed as a new form of labyrinth fit for our times, where we can view the centerless rhizome as "a representation of the structure of cyberspace and link it up with poststructuralist discourse on the conditions of life in the postmodern world".[202] However, as Veel elaborates, labyrinths tend to exist in a duality of perception; that from above, as seen by a creator, and that from within, as seen by the wanderer. While in the maze, the wanderer cannot perceive whether or not it is infinite or how interconnected the paths are, which is why the rhizome of the internet is experienced as a maze – for the rhizome can only be identified as such, and distinguished from a traditional labyrinth, when seen from above. Veel also makes an excellent point stating that the use of the labyrinthine metaphor in relation to cyberspace is popular "because it makes it possible to read this more or less abstract type of space as linked to a bodily orientation that calls for experience just as much as for rational analysis".[203] In other words, it links the abstract with the material, which helps with visualization – yet another way in which the idea of a labyrinth is linked to the process of understanding, and which also negates the notion of the cyberspace as a thing completely detached from the material.

Veel explores this not only through cyberspace as a labyrinthine environment, but also through the image of the city as a labyrinth and the interaction between the viewer and

[201] Vichnar <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/internetting-the-book/>.
[202] Veel, 155.
[203] Veel, 152.

walker. Her essay was written too early to incorporate this, but the merged entities of the viewer and walker are perhaps best represented by the Google Maps location services, through which we are located both in the physical, bodily experience of the city-maze, as well as on the map, viewed by ourselves from above, tracing our way through the labyrinth. However, GPS technology takes away from the process of exploration in a new city, and it is not surprising that many people choose not to use it when roaming places for fun. Therefore, contemporary urban walkers, if they wish to perceive a city as a maze, often prefer not to check "the blue dot". This unveils another characteristic of a maze, for as Walter Benjamin wrote:

> The labyrinth is the habitat of the dawdler. The path followed by someone reluctant to reach his goal easily becomes labyrinthine. A drive, in the stages leading to its satisfaction, acts likewise. But so, too, does a humanity (a class) which does not want to know where its destiny is taking it.[204]

While some wanderers enter a labyrinth in order to solve the puzzle and gain perfect understanding of either the maze itself or the larger, external universe it may represent, some take the wander either for fun or in order to avoid coming to a conclusion or finding a solution.

Cities in particular lend themselves to aimless wandering: an individual can be quickly consumed not only by the architectural maze, but also the maze of the masses. In Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy,* the city is described as a labyrinth. The image is especially powerful in the first part, *The City of Glass,* where the detective-by-chance Quinn first experiences the city as "a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost".[205] The wanderer then turns into the pursuer, as Quinn begins to trace the steps of Peter Stillman, an old man has been hired to follow, drawing maps of the man's wanderings. In the end, he becomes consumed by the city, abandoning his old life for the streets. In all three of the stories in Auster's trilogy, the city is full of a mass of people, yet the protagonist experiences the streets as a lone wanderer. A traditional labyrinth is usually empty, and the process of walking the paths deeply individual – in the labyrinthine city, this

[204] Walter Benjamin, "Central Park", *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) 171.
[205] Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 4.

is amplified by the anonymity experienced by being surrounded by a mass of people, and yet being alone.

While the process of navigating the labyrinth is often purposeless, Nathalie Cochoy does not see the protagonists in contemporary American fiction who find themselves perambulating in the city as merely wandering or getting lost. She states that "the motif of urban walking, in American novels, cannot be reduced to some aimless flânerie or to some despaired meandering or deciphering of signs, but that it invents a new way of writing the city".[206] Through the meanders, as the city is mapped, the inadequacy of language is questioned – in *The City of Glass*, Peter Stillman's project is to name broken things, things that can no longer perform their intended function and therefore cannot be called by their original name.[207] At the same time, as he walks through the city, he uses his steps to trace letters using the city streets. He is followed by Quinn, who deciphers his walks and finds that they spell "THE TOWER OF BABEL". While Stillman works on his dictionary of broken things, Quinn works on a map of the city, based on Stillman's walks. The connection between the walking, the city, and language therefore creates a combination of a spatial and linguistic maze. While Auster's trilogy is not in itself a labyrinthine work of fiction, the urban labyrinth it contains betrays something about how we view the environments in which we live.

Other novels have explored the image of the city as a labyrinth, one of the most notable of which is Alain Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth,* a novel whose labyrinthine structure has been analyzed by several critics. The soldier experiences the city as a labyrinth without a center or at least a labyrinth in which the center cannot be found – he is to deliver a box, but he cannot find the street or the man who is to receive the box in the city that has no landmarks and where the streets all look the same. His city is a centerless labyrinth not because that is how cities are in reality, but because that is how it is perceived by the soldier. The novel is reflexive but hardly referential to anything outside itself. The soldier is disconnected from the masses of people that logically must fill the city, which reinforces the image of the soldier as an alienated, lonely entity, and his death in the end implies that the labyrinth is closed and unsolvable.

As mentioned in Chapter III of this thesis, *Gravity's Rainbow* also contains the city as a maze, amplifying the insignificance of any one individual. So the city can function as a labyrinth to be explored for pleasure, a puzzle to learn where the wanderer can lose

---

[206] Nathalie Cochoy, "Walking, Writing—Reinventing the City in American Fiction", *South Atlantic Review* 76.4, Fall 2011: 44.
[207] Auster, 79.

themselves in the cityscape, while on the other hand the anonymity provided by the city can also lead to a feeling of loss and loneliness, and even insignificance. The maze is therefore never merely the physical structure of the streets, alleys, squares, but also the path we take through it, and how we perceive this path. Labyrinths in postmodernism are present not only in our physical surroundings, but also in our digital environment. Video games and gamebooks are already changing how we experience narratives, and the introduction of a new television genre of which *Bandersnatch* is a part might completely change how we see our passive roles as viewers, and revolutionize television. On the other hand, what happened to hypertext fiction might also happen in this case. In fact, that is the more plausible outcome: while labyrinthine television experiences might become more popular in the future, it is unlikely that the genre will displace the existing way we stream and watch series or films. Either way, labyrinthine narratives, either in digital, film, or literary forms are seemingly not only here to stay, but are gaining in popularity.

Conclusion

It is not a coincidence that the analyses of *Gravity's Rainbow, Infinite Jest,* and *House of Leaves* follow the chronological order in which the books were written. It would seem that as the years have progressed, labyrinthine novels have tended to have more and more complicated labyrinthine structures – Reed Doob's study of earlier labyrinthine texts and Faris's study of modernist labyrinthine works could not have included a book as mazy as *House of Leaves*, because no such book had yet been written. Furthermore, the use of features such as footnotes and endnotes to create a multicursal maze which gives the reader choices was not the standard form of novels in the previous centuries. To be sure, it is not the standard form now, but a novel with endnotes is not considered out of place in the 20th and 21st centuries. As indicated by the popularity of videogames, gamebooks and the introduction of *Bandersnatch*, participatory fictional narratives might become more common in the future. In literature, this means that labyrinthine storylines are not only becoming more common but are also becoming more structured and more closely resemble actual multicursal mazes. This is mainly exemplified in the placement of the words on the page, in the changes in fonts and text size, and through footnotes, endnotes, and various annexes or appendices.

While the reading process for older labyrinthine texts such as those analyzed by Reed Doob in her book does resemble wandering through a labyrinth, those texts are "labyrinth[s] of words"[208] only because of the progression and flow of the narrative and not also because of how the story looks on a printed page. Unfortunately it also appears that this shift towards the more explicit labyrinthine form is accompanied by a decrease in the extent to which these novels refer to the reality outside either their fictional universe or outside an individual character. Labyrinths are reflexive, self-contained and isolated systems, meaning that once the wanderer enters, they become disconnected from the outside. By becoming more and more explicitly labyrinthine, postmodern mazy novels focus less and less on external factors, for example on the influence of social causes for various behaviors in people. The tendency is towards internal, psychological labyrinths that entrap a person and guide them deeper within their own mind (to usually ill effect) without seeking a connection with the external world in which this person resides. Personal issues and trauma therefore become the responsibility of the individual who is experiencing them, denying either external causes for the struggle or the possibility of an external solution. This shift towards focusing extensively on the internal

[208] Reed Doob, 221.

workings of an individual therefore ignores their role in society, or the role society plays in affecting the individual's life. Consequently, postmodern labyrinthine novels tend to include less and less explicit social criticism – but that does not mean we cannot draw conclusions about our society from the silence.

The reasons for this move towards a less outward-facing novel form are complicated, and it would not be possible to adequately list and analyze each and every single one. However, it is likely that they are related to the continued rise and power of individualism in Western, especially American culture. As Cyrus Patell writes in *Negative Liberties*, "individualism remains at the heart of American ideology".[209] If the individual is ideologically viewed not as a part of a community, but as an entity not only separate, but also more important than their social surroundings, that means that society is viewed as a secondary entity. It would then follow that while society can be explained by the behaviors, needs, and actions of participating individuals, individual behaviors, needs, and actions cannot be explained by factors stemming from society. This is evident in the concept of the American Dream, where anyone supposedly can become rich and happy through hard work and persistence, and which not only ignores important social and political factors that might stand as barriers, but also fails to recognize that the very idea of what it means to be rich and happy as understood by the American public is conditioned by American society.

Individualism as an ideology at the core of American identity is reflected in the novels written about American life. Because individualism is on the rise, novels deal with more and more individualistic topics and focus more on the internal workings of characters unrelated to the external factors – and labyrinths, where a sole wanderer seeks to attain understanding, provide a very fitting setting. However, as opposed to labyrinths in the Middle Ages, postmodern labyrinthine texts are not a calming environment – they are sinister and dangerous. For Reed Doob, a good textual labyrinth is "designed to be comprehended: it leads to valuable goals (new knowledge, relaxation, improvement of skills), and its ambiguous, difficult method of reaching those goals is both pleasurable and instructive",[210] but while this applies to the texts analyzed in her book, the same is not true for contemporary, postmodern labyrinths. More often, the character cannot find the right path and finally loses themselves in a psychological maze. As seen in the three novels analyzed herein, Slothrop loses his identity, Hal falls into the trap of addiction, and Truant cannot escape childhood

[209] Cyrus R. K. Patell, *Negative Liberties: Morrison, Pynchon, and the Problem of Liberal Ideology* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2001) 11.
[210] Reed Doob, 221.

trauma. These labyrinths of individuality, because they fail to recount for social factors that contribute to the causes of their problems in the first place, cannot provide a viable solution and are therefore forced to be menacing – they are labyrinths *in malo*.

Gravity's Rainbow, written in the seventies, is the least labyrinthine, at least according to the criteria followed herein – on the other hand, it contains the most social criticism. While it deals with issues of past and childhood trauma (such as Slothrop's search for information on the experiments possibly performed on him as an infant), as well as identity and mental collapse, the novel does not center solely on the issues of the individual, or how they are affected by the external happenings. While many of the characters, most importantly Slothrop, are entrapped in a labyrinth of paranoia, there is also criticism of that very paranoia – the labyrinthine structure and the chaotic, crumbling narrative represent what in his review of the book Richard Locke called "the sinking ship of Western culture".[211] Pynchon's exploration of the individual minds affected by the obscenity and absurdity of war is accompanied by his criticism of the very forces that set the war in motion in the first place – the profit-focused political and social structures in Western society. As Katje is reminded: "the real business of the War is buying and selling," and "true war is a celebration of markets", where the "mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways," because it "serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War".[212] The reasons behind the mental disintegration experienced by Slothrop can be traced back to the Pavlovian conditioning he was presumably exposed to as a child – but the reasons behind the abuse were a result of the business-oriented society that prioritized the testing of their product over the health and wellbeing of a child.

The complicated structure of the novel mirrors the convoluted and perverse forces that cause death and destruction of many for the benefit of the few. The narrative disintegration mimics the collapse of Slothrop's mind. The labyrinthine characteristics of the novel therefore function not only to propel the events that transpire in the novel, but also serve as criticism of the actors who are behind the events – the war, the experiments, the paranoia-inducing governmental control. As such, the labyrinthine structure serves to criticize the social structure. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, there is nothing good about mazes and labyrinths – they are shown as sinister, dangerous, and dark. The idea of the postmodern labyrinth itself is criticized, as it does not serve any function other than to mirror the negative social structures:

[211] Locke <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>.
[212] Pynchon, 124.

being trapped in a postmodern labyrinth is indicative of living in a postmodern society, and the society is as absurd, obscene and grotesque as a minotaur.

Infinite Jest deals extensively with addiction, but does not elaborate on the connection between addiction and society, or the fact that it can affect any person regardless of their social standing. Individuals suffering from addiction are presented as isolated, each trapped in their own maze. So while the social criticism is not explicit, the very descriptions of how addicted individuals perceive and experience their role (or lack thereof) in society offers a negative view of this society – their inability to cope can be seen as a failure on the part of the social structures, even if this is not mentioned explicitly. To be sure, the 12-step recovery model is presented as a potentially successful treatment, and Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are essentially forms of supportive communities – individuals can attend meetings where they share their stories and receive assistance from fellow sufferers. In this, the novel offers some connection between various individuals who can help each other – however, societal factors and social reasons behind addiction are not explored, and the people attending AA and NA meetings are essentially shut out from the rest of society and left to seek the company of their own kind. Furthermore, because each addict must seek solutions within themselves and not look outside for reasons, this strips the external world of the responsibility for the addicts or their recovery.

When it comes to the issues of shallow entertainment, pollution (both spiritual and environmental), and the declining role of strong communities, *Infinite Jest* chooses to parody rather than seriously criticize. This is an indication of despair and a feeling of helplessness – as if trapped in a maze without an exit or center, humanity chooses to mock rather than fight what it dislikes about the direction its society and culture seems to be taking. This is indicative of a certain malaise with the progression of human history, and perhaps a symptom of what Marcuse addresses in *One-Dimensional Man*, namely that we live in a one-dimensional society where “the "inner" dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down”.[213] Faced with affluence and efficiency of (especially Western) society, the individual is incapable of forming effective criticism of its failings in the spheres of community building and welfare. Because of the values promoted in capitalist cultures, where the focus is on profit and personal liberty, the strength once provided by a strong community is neutralized. Each individual is supposed to take care only of themselves, and subsequently to look only within themselves for the causes of their pain.

[213] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002) 13.

In *Out of the Wreckage*, George Monbiot writes about the importance of community, which in our current economic system "is nowhere to be seen",[214] and indeed at least in *Infinite Jest*, community does not play a strong role: both the microcosm of tennis academy and the ONANite society are individualistic.

The combination of social nihilism, along with complacency and a lack of community that could counter the feelings of hopelessness can be found in the labyrinthine form of *Infinite Jest*, where the failings of society to produce happy, healthy individuals are parodied rather than seriously opposed. Even Remy Marathe, arguably the most oppositional character in the novel, is presented through the lens of jest and mimicry. However, the lesson is not that we should laugh at the man who will not abandon his principles – but rather than we should pity him. Betraying his political cause to save his ailing and mentally incapacitated wife, Remy gives in to the system he has spent his entire life trying to undermine. Seen in this way, *Infinite Jest* is a postmodern dystopian warning of dangers to come, but one that provides no solutions – the message is rather that the labyrinth cannot be solved.

The structure of *House of Leaves* is the most labyrinthine, and the mentions of mazes and labyrinths in the text are too many to enumerate. It plays with the image of the labyrinth as a house, as a myth, as an analogy for the universe, even as the shape of the human ear. *House of Leaves* is also the most focused on the psychology of an individual and concerns itself the least with social issues or external causes, such as cultural or economic, other than how they can be interpreted by or how they affect an individual. The Navidson storyline has some connection to the external world, mainly in the commentary on the ethics of photojournalism in environments ravaged by war and famine. Navidson continues to struggle with feeling of guilt regarding Delial, and the context and circumstances surrounding his taking of the photo. The photograph shows the chasm between the person taking the picture and the person whose picture is being taken – they are socially at opposite spectrums, one with the expensive gear and the other dying of starvation. The fact that Navidson was rewarded for the photograph makes these differences even more apparent, as well as deepens his feelings of guilt. However, the novel does not comment on the society that perpetuates war or allows children to suffer, but instead delves deeper into the psychological trauma experienced by the photographer. Delial is therefore not a person in her own right, but is reduced to a symbol, because she is discussed in terms of her meaning to Navidson and his mental maze of guilt rather than as a person belonging to the same society as he.

[214] George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage* (London: Verso, 2018) 75.

The labyrinth in the Navidson house reflects and responds to the mental states of those who enter, but it is still described as a physical structure, impossible as its size and properties may be. On the other hand, the labyrinth that entraps Truant is purely psychological, and the narrative structure of the novel reflects his inner struggles – the labyrinth is therefore more abstract, inverted, and a manifestation of the mind of one individual, who is its sole focus. Larger society does not feature in Truant's search for the causes of his trauma: the implication is that Truant might find a solution to his problems by walking the mental maze, and by exploring the memories find inner peace. Thus, the maze is first set as a medieval meditative maze or a turf maze where a patient follower of the path will reach the center – but Truant's search does not come to a peaceful resolution. Instead, his anguish deepens and is still unresolved when the novel ends: this indicates that a deep dive into the labyrinth of one's psyche will not solve one's problems. Again, this is not explicit, but perhaps the reason for the failure is the lack of a meaningful connection between the individual and their wider society, and the individualistic focus on the internal factors that excludes socio-economic ones. To be sure, some of Truant's trauma can be traced to his time in foster care, but it is presented as caused by his abusive foster father – the foster care system or the social structures that lead to its existence are neither mentioned nor questioned. This points to a trend that can be observed in contemporary society – individuals take it upon themselves to bear the blame and feel the guilt for the entirety of their personal failings and absolve the society of any responsibility by not exploring possible societal factors that may have contributed to their problems.

Postmodern features such as general unreliability of information magnify the feelings of unease that these novels convey. The paranoia and isolation felt by the characters are mixed with questions such as personal freedom and free will – issues addressed in Chapter V. As seen with *Bandersnatch,* these difficult questions are primarily used as a form of entertainment rather than an attempt to seriously influence material reality through criticism. However, postmodern labyrinths in digital and film forms also indicate an interesting development – they juxtapose infinite rhizomes with the traditional form of circular, closed labyrinths, an idea that shows promise. The use of the labyrinthine metaphor is fitting because the symbol of the labyrinth fits the complexity and messiness of our contemporary times – the very urban environments in which most of us reside resemble mazes. However, one of the reasons for the similarity is the feeling of isolation that cities can instill in its

dwellers and wanderers – it is the anonymity and insignificance that makes the maze unpleasant.

This is because the very nature of labyrinths is to isolate an individual from the external world – be it for reasons of meditation and self-reflection or for the purposes of horror and destruction. Labyrinths in postmodernism are becoming more focused on the internal, where the maze represents the psychological workings of one's mind. While the initial intention of exploring the labyrinth might be to solve the puzzle, this mission is almost never successful and the structure of the maze often disintegrates, with negative consequences for the wanderer. So while society as a causal or healing force does not feature in these novels, they still show how society is seen (or not seen) as a factor in an individual's life. While criticism is therefore not explicit, the very lack of it can tell us something about how these labyrinthine works present society – as something external and disconnected from the individual. As Cyrus Patell writes, literature has an "ability to dramatize the complexities and idiosyncrasies of human life",[215] which includes individuals and their society. In fact, I would argue that there is no clear line between what is individual and what is social – it is all intertwined. This is exemplified in how even highly individualistic literature can still tell us something about the society that produced it, even if the message is that society is being ignored and the sense of interpersonal connectivity is being eroded.

Through the use of the labyrinth as form and theme, postmodern labyrinthine literature can therefore shed some light on how we see ourselves and the world in which we live. The symbol of the labyrinth as an intransitive, circular and isolated system represents the isolation experienced by individuals who are disconnected from wider society and lack a sense of community. This is how the idea of the labyrinth works in relation to human psychology and one's place in contemporary society. On the other hand, contemporary mazes as structures – the physical labyrinths of our times – have ceased to be grand buildings to house tombs or monsters, but have been demoted to providing simple entertainment at fun fairs. Corn mazes and mirror mazes offer little beyond shallow entertainment and fun. Even the more complicated hedge mazes built today tend to cater much more to the wanderer and help out those lost with "Lift if Lost" panels, arrows, and exit routes for the bored.[216] Such mazes aspire to please the market, assuming that what the audience wants is something not too complicated and especially not anything that could make them truly uncomfortable.

[215] Patell, xv.
[216] Eliot, 201.

The true power of postmodern labyrinths is how they are used metaphorically, and the development of physical contemporary mazes is at odds with the development of mazes in literature, which have become darker and creepier. While still containing the undertones of entertainment, textual labyrinths can also be genuinely disturbing. Entertainment is presented as a vice rather than as a pleasurable and valuable part of human existence – it is a way to escape reality. This tells us that reality might be something one would wish to escape, and is therefore critical of the world in which we live. However, the form this criticism takes is parody and satire, which makes the arguments appear less serious, or at least indicates a lack of confidence in the possibility for improvement. If we view postmodern labyrinths as a method for isolating the individual and as structures with no true solution or exit, the image uncovered is rather bleak. Perhaps it is a warning, an indication of a wrong path taken by humanity that is proving to be a dead end.

However, as we know from history, labyrinths can also be labyrinths *in bono*, where careful analysis of all available data can lead to positive outcomes. Postmodernism may not be able to offer many solutions, but perhaps whatever comes next will not allow itself to be lead down the path of despair, but will help us walk the maze with utopian intention. The trend towards infinite labyrinths that is now emerging through the connection with cyberspace, and through viewing the universe itself as a labyrinth eliminates the restrictions on the number of available choices. If the universe is an infinite garden of forking paths, then there is always hope – one just must be careful to not forget the lessons of history, to not ignore the external and social factors, and to make choices that are based not on chance, but on knowledge and reflection.

Bibliography

Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

Barth, John. “The Literature of Exhaustion”. *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch. Dir. David Slade. Writ. Charlie Brooker Prod. Netflix, 2019.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Chai, Howard. “The Illusion of Control in ‘Black Mirror: Bandersnatch’”. *Medium*. 1 Jan. 2019. 3 Nov. 2019. <https://medium.com/s/story/black-mirror-bandersnatch-a-study-guide-c46dfe9156d>.

“Chapter 8 page 97”. *House of leaves blog*. 13 Mar. 2013. 11 Oct. 2019. <https://houseofleavesblog.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/chapter-8-page-97/>.

Cioffi, Frank Louis. "An Anguish Become Thing": Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest"”. *Narrative* 8.2 May 2000:161-181.

Coleman, Kathleen M. “Cacemphaton in the Labyrinth: Ovid, Heroides 10.71”. *Mnemosyne* 63.2 2010: 280-286.

Connor, Steve. “Has the original Labyrinth been found?” *The Independent*. 16 Oct. 2009. 10 July 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture/has-the-original-labyrinth-been-found-1803638.html>.

Cox, Katharine. *Labyrinths: Navigating Daedalus' Legacy. The Role of Labyrinths in Selected Contemporary Fiction*. 2005. University of Hull.

Cox, Katharine. “What Has Made Me? Locating Mother in the Textual Labyrinth of Mark Z. Danielewski's "House of Leaves"”. *Critical Survey* 18.2. 2006: 4-15.

Danielewski, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*. New York: Pantheon, 2000.

Di Placido, Dani. “What Is Netflix's 'Russian Doll' Really About?” *Forbes*. 20 Feb. 2019. 29 Nov. 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2019/02/20/what-is-netflixs-russian-doll-really-about/#1a0331172576>.

Donahue, Anne Marie. “David Foster Wallace winces at the suggestion that his book is sloppy in any sense”. An interview with David Foster Wallace. *The Boston Phoenix.* 21 – 28 Mar 1996. 22 Aug 2019. <http://www.smallbytes.net/~bobkat/boston2.html>.

Eliot, Henry. *Follow This Thread: A Maze Book to Get Lost In.* New York: Three Rivers Press, 2018.

Fahey, Ryan. “Video game addict, 17, is found slumped dead on his computer after suffering a stroke as he played at night in Thailand Video game addict, 17, is found slumped dead on his computer after suffering a stroke as he played at night in Thailand”. *Daily Mail Online.* 5 Nov. 2019. 27 Nov. 2019. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7650671/Video-game-addict-17-slumped-dead-computer-Thailand.html>.

Faris, Wendy B. *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988.

“Five minutes with Mark Z Danielewski.” An interview with Mark Z Danielewski. *The Guardian.* 30 Nov. 2000. 7 Oct. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/30/guardianfirstbookaward2000.gurardianfirstbookaward>.

Glaser, Gabrielle. “The Irrationality of Alcoholics Anonymous”. *The Atlantic*, April 2015. 18 Aug. 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/the-irrationality-of-alcoholics-anonymous/386255/>.

Hamilton, Natalie. “The A-Mazing House: The Labyrinth as Theme and Form in Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves”. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50.1. 2008: 3-16.

Hansen, Mark B. N. “The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski's "House of Leaves".” *Contemporary Literature* 45.4 winter 2004: 597-636.

Harris, Aisha, Margaret Lyons and Maureen Ryan. "'Bandersnatch' Has Many Paths, but Do Any of Them Add Up to Anything?" *The New York Times.* 4 Jan. 2019. 3 Nov. 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/04/arts/television/bandersnatch-black-mirror-netflix.html>.

Hawthorne Mark D. "Pynchon's Early Labyrinths". *College Literature* 25.2 spring, 1998: 78-93.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Saving the Subject: Remediation in House of Leaves." *American Literature* 74.4 Dec. 2002: 779-806.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and "Infinite Jest"". *New Literary History* 30.3 summer, 1999: 675-697.

Heaney, Seamus, Richard Kearney, and Jorge Luis Borges. "Borges and the World of Fiction: An Interview with Jorge Luis Borges". *The Crane Bag* 6.2 1982: 71-78.

Higgins, Charlotte. *Red Thread: On Mazes and Labyrinths*. London: Jonathan Cape: 2018.

"History of CYOA" *Choose Your Own Adventure.* 30 Oct. 2019. <https://www.cyoa.com/pages/history-of-cyoa>.

Hite, Molly. *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983.

Hughes, William. "Mark Z. Danielewski's script for a House Of Leaves TV pilot is just as bewildering and fascinating as the book". *The A.V. Club*. 11 July 2018. 21 Oct. 2019. <https://news.avclub.com/mark-z-danielewskis-script-for-a-house-of-leaves-tv-pi-1827526193>.

Hume, Kathryn "Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in Gravity's Rainbow". *American Literature* 60.4 Dec. 1988: 625-642.

Hume, Kathryn and Thomas J. Knight. "Pynchon's Orchestration of "Gravity's Rainbow"." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85.3 July 1986: 366-385.

Infinite Jest Wiki. 19 Aug. 2019. <https://infinitejest.wallacewiki.com/david-foster-wallace/index.php?title=Main_Page>.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1992.

Johnson, Steven. “Why No One Clicked on the Great Hypertext Story”. *Wired.* 16 April 2013. 11 Nov. 2019. <https://www.wired.com/2013/04/hypertext/>.

Knight-Jadczyk, Laura. *The Secret History of the World and How to Get Out Alive*. Otto: Red Pill Press, 2005.

Kotsonas, Antonis. “A Cultural History of the Cretan Labyrinth: Monument and Memory from Prehistory to the Present”. *American Journal of Archaeology* 122.3 July 2018: 367-396.

Letzler, David. “Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft of Fiction: “Infinite Jest”’s Endnotes”. *Studies in the Novel* 44.3 fall 2012: 304-324.

Lloyd, Alan B. “The Egyptian Labyrinth”. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* Aug. 1970: 81-100.

Locke, Richard “One of the Longest, Most Difficult, Most Ambitious Novels in Years”. Rev. of Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon. In *The New York Times*. 11 Mar 1973. 22 July 2019. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-rainbow.html>.

Luck, Katherine. “The darkest secrets of Choose Your Own Adventure books”. *the delve*. 16 June 2018. 30 Oct. 2019. <https://the-delve.com/2018/06/16/choose-your-own-adventure/#dread>.

Mangan, Lucy. “Black Mirror: Bandersnatch review – the TV of tomorrow is now here”. *The Guardian*. 1 Jan. 2019. 3 Nov. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jan/01/black-mirror-bandersnatch-review-charlie-brooker-netflix-tv-of-tomorrow-is-now-here>.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002.

Marr, Bernard. “Why Too Much Data Is Stressing Us Out”. *Forbes*. 25 Nov. 2015. 31 Aug. 2019. < https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2015/11/25/why-too-much-data-is-stressing-us-out/#53b37f5cf763>.

Matthews, W. H. *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1922.

Max, D. T. “The Unfinished”. *The New Yorker.* 28 Feb. 2009. 26 Nov. 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/09/the-unfinished>.

“maze”. Etymology. *Wiktionary*. July 10 2019. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/maze>.

McCrum, Kristie. “Tragic teen gamer dies after 'playing computer for 22 days in a row'”. *Mirror*. 3 Sep. 2015. 27 Nov. 2019. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/tragic-teen-gamer-dies-after-6373887>.

McHugh, Patrick. “Cultural Politics, Postmodernism, and White Guys: Affect in "Gravity's Rainbow". *College Literature* 28.2 spring, 2001: 1-28.

McInerney, Jay. “'Infinite Jest'”. Rev. of *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace. In *The New York Times*. 3 Mar 1996. 18 Aug 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/03/news/infinite-jest.html>.

Mendelson, Edward. “Edward Mendelson on Enyclopedic Nature”. *Thomas Pynchon.* Ed. Harold Bloom. Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.

Mendelson, Edward. “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon”. *MLN* 91.6 Dec. 1976: 1267-1275.

Mengiste, Maaza. “We must not look away from the crises in Africa “ *The Guardian.* 31 July 2014. 28 Nov. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/31/world-tired-africas-tragedies-look-harder>.

Miller, J. Hillis. “Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line”. *Critical Inquiry* 3.1 Autumn, 1976: 57-7.

Miller, Laura. “David Foster Wallace”. An interview with David Foster Wallace. *Salon*. 9 Mar 1996. 22 Aug 2019. <https://www.salon.com/test/1996/03/09/wallace_5/>.

Miller, S.G. “Chapter 9: Labyrinth”. *House of leaves blog*. 11 May 2013. 21 Oct. 2019. <https://houseofleavesblog.wordpress.com/2013/05/11/chapter-9-labyrinth/>.

Miller, W. R. and K. M. Carroll, eds. *Rethinking Substance Abuse: What Science Shows, and What We Should Do About It*. New York: Guilford Press: 2006.

Monbiot, George. *Out of the Wreckage*. London: Verso, 2018.

Montfort, Nick, et al. *10 PRINT CHR$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012.

Moore, Thomas. *The Style of Connectedness*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987.

Moss, Emma-Lee. "Infinite Jest at 20: still a challenge, still brilliant." *The Guardian*. 15 Feb. 2016. 27 May 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/feb/15/infinite-jest-at-20-still-a-challenge-still-brilliant-emma-lee-moss>.

Newton, Maud. "Jules Siegel on Pynchon's Wife". *Maud Newton Blog.* 28 Mar. 2014. 1 Dec. 2019. <http://maudnewton.com/blog/jules-siegel-on-pynchons-wife/>.

Patell, Cyrus R. K. *Negative Liberties: Morrison, Pynchon, and the Problem of Liberal Ideology*. Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2001.

"Pelican Poems & HoL". *MZD Forums*. 11 Dec. 2002-7 Jan. 2003. 19 Oct. 2019. <http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/house-of-leaves/house-of-leaves-aa/1276-pelican-poems-hol>.

Piepenbring, Dan. "Planned Obsolescence." *The Paris Review*. 7 Oct. 2014. 26 July 2019. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/10/07/planned-obsolescence/>.

Poole, Steven. "Gothic scholar". *The Guardian*. 15 Jul. 2000. 7 Oct. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/30/guardianfirstbookaward2000.gurardianfirstbookaward>.

Price Persson, Charlotte. "Did Stone Age people build a large labyrinth in Denmark?" *ScienceNordic*. 17 Feb. 2017. July 8 2019. < http://sciencenordic.com/did-stone-age-people-build-large-labyrinth-denmark>.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Vintage Books, 2000.

Reed Doob, Penelope. *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press: 1990.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet: Jealousy and In the Labyrinth*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Groove Press, 1965.

Roraback, Erik S. *The Philosophical Baroque: On Autopoietic Modernities*. Brill: Leiden, 2017.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "One man's meat is another man's Poisson." Blog post, copy of review for *The Village Voice,* 1973. 7 Feb. 2019. 22 July 2019. <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2019/02/one-mans-meat-is-another-mans-poisson/>.

Russian Doll. Created by Natasha Lyonne, Leslye Headland and Amy Poehler. Prod. Netflix 2019-.

Schwarzbach, F.S. "A Matter of Gravity". *Pynchon: a collection of critical essays*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978. 57-68.

Seed, David. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1988.

Siegel, Jules. "Who Is This Thomas Pynchon... and Why Did He Take Off with My Wife?" *Playboy Magazine*. March 1977. 22 July 2019. <https://www.waste.org/mail/?list=pynchon-l&month=9505&msg=1496&keywords=siegal>.

Stivers, Valerie. "The Jester Holds Court". *Stim*. 1996. 22 Aug 2019. <http://www.stim.com/Stim-x/0596May/Verbal/dfwtalk.html>.Stoltzfus, Ben. "Robbe-Grillet's Labyrinths: Structure and Meaning". *Contemporary Literature* 22.3. Summer 1981: 292-307.

Swineheart, Christian. "One Book, Many Readings". *Samizdat.* 30 Oct. 2019. <http://samizdat.co/cyoa/#>.

"Television Watching and "Sit Time"". *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.* 27 Nov. 2019. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-causes/television-and-sedentary-behavior-and-obesity/#References>.

The OA. Created by Zal Batmanglij and Brit Marling. Prod. Netflix 2016-2019.

Veel, Kristin. "The Irreducibility of Space: Labyrinths, Cities, Cyberspace". *Diacritics* 33.3/4. autumn – winter 2003: 151-172.

Vichnar, David. “Mark Danielewski’s House of Leaves as hypermedia”. *Equus Press*. 23 June 2014. 11 Nov. 2019. <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/internetting-the-book/>.

Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest.* London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2008.

Wallace, David Foster. “E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction”. *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 Summer 1993: 151-194.

Wampler, Scott. “EXCLUSIVE: We Had a Chat With Mark Z. Danielewski About That HOUSE OF LEAVES Script”. *Birth.Movies.Death.* 16 Jul. 2018. 7 Oct. 2019. <https://birthmoviesdeath.com/2018/07/16/mark-z-danielewski-house-of-leaves-tv-show>.

Weed, Ethan. “A Labyrinth of Symbols: Exploring 'The Garden of Forking Paths'“. *Variaciones Borges*. 2004: 161-189.

Westermeyer, Joseph. “The role of cultural and social factors in the cause of addictive disorders”. *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 22.2 June 1999: 253-73.

Westervelt Linda A., "A Place Dependent on Ourselves: The Reader as System-Builder in Gravity's Rainbow”. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22.1 spring 1980: 69-90.

Abstract

This thesis explores the labyrinthine nature of three primary texts: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. Various labyrinthine features of the novels, such as labyrinthine narrative, language, structure on the page and labyrinths as a plot element are discussed to determine the extent to which these novels resemble mazes. Also considered are the choices readers make when reading forking, labyrinthine narratives and the level to which they become participants in guiding the narrative. Furthermore, the thesis explores what postmodern labyrinthine novels have to say about the society and our contemporary understanding of material reality. It discusses the reasons behind the shift to the increasingly complex and more sinister multicursal labyrinths that are predominant in our time, which are indicative of a crisis in society caused by excessive individualism. While the primary focus is on the aforementioned three novels, the thesis also includes other media and other forms of labyrinthine narratives to show the diversity of the form and the prevalence of mazes in our time, as well as to discuss the development of the mazy form in the future.

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá tři primární texty, které svou povahou připomínají labyrint: *Gravity's Rainbow* Thomase Pynchona, *Infinite Jest* Davida Fostera Wallace a *House of Leaves* Marka Z. Danielewski. Různé labyrintu podobné aspekty vybraných románů, jako například jejich narativní linka, jazyk, grafická struktura stránky a užití labyrintů jako příběhových prvků, jsou analyzovány tak, aby bylo možno určit způsob a rozsah jakým dané texty připomínají bludiště. V potaz jsou brána i rozhodnutí čtenářů, kterým musí čelit díky rozdělujícím se labyrintovým příběhům a úroveň, do které se stávají účastníky příběhů, posouvající ho vpřed. Práce dále zkoumá jaký postoj zaujímají postmoderní texty ke společnosti a současnému chápání materiální skutečnosti. Rozebírá důvody k posunu směrem ke stále více komplexnějším a neblahým spletitých labyrintů, které jsou stále častějším a dominantním faktorem naší doby, a které indikují krizi společnosti způsobenou nadmírou individualismu. Zatímco se práce soustředí především na tři zmíněné romány, jsou v ní zahrnuty a probírány i další média a formy labyrintových příběhů, dokazující diverzitu formy a převládající působení bludišť i v současnosti. Zároveň otevírán prostor k diskuzi ohledně vývoje bludišti podobných forem v budoucnosti.